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THE CALIFORNIA CODING WIZARDS KEEPING CLASSIC VIDEOGAMES ALIVE

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BEHIND THE SCENES OF SYSTEM SHOCK 2'S SPIRITUAL SUCCESSOR

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE DONKEY KONG COUNTRY GAME?

DARRAN JONES

Donkey Kong Country Returns for me, even with the annoying motion-based moves. It's just so much fun.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *Ridge Racer 7*
Favourite game of all time: *Strider*

TIM EMPEY

Donkey Kong Country on the SNES. I've never owned a SNES or played *DKC*, but the graphics gave me Mega Drive buyer's remorse.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go.
Currently playing: *Cyberpunk 2077*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE

The first one. My cousin got it for his SNES, and even as a devout Sega kid, it was just impossible to deny how impressive it was.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: *Blue Reflection: Second Light*
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

If we are only picking actual *Donkey Kong* games and not games featuring the big guy or Jr. I'd go for *Donkey Kong Jr* on Game & Watch.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding: *RTR: Imperium Surrectum*
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now.

PAUL DRURY

Donkey Kong Country Returns on the 3DS. I have vivid memories of my eldest daughter absolutely nailing the rock-hard mine cart stage. So proud.
Expertise: Coulrophobia
Currently playing: *Turrican Anthology Vol 2*
Favourite game of all time: *Sheep In Space*

PAUL ROSE

I'll pick the very first *Donkey Kong Country*, for the sheer impact those visuals had at the time.
Expertise: Winging it
Currently playing: *Kid Klown In Crazy Chase*
Favourite game of all time: *Half-Life 2*

ANDREW FISHER

The original SNES game – I got it with the console second-hand in 1994, and it still looks amazing now.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: *Black Dawn Technomage*
Favourite game of all time: *Wizball*

RORY MILNE

I love Dixie's ponytail drifting move, and Kiddy has some novel abilities, so I guess *Donkey Kong Country 3* is my favourite – although the entire series is excellent.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Crimson Skies*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*

MARTYN CARROLL

The SNES games are great, but for me *Donkey Kong Country Returns* on the Wii is the series' high point. It looks gorgeous while retaining its old-school sensibilities.
Expertise: Sinclair stuff
Currently playing: *Silt*
Favourite game of all time: *Jet Set Willy*

It's easy to forget now, but *Donkey Kong Country* felt like the future when it debuted on Nintendo's SNES in 1994. Rare had been tasked with updating the *Donkey Kong* series for a new audience and in my mind it succeeded admirably, and it remains in my SNES collection to this very day.

What a delight then to speak to developers involved with not only the SNES original and its sequels, but also the *Donkey Kong Land* spin-offs, the successful reboots by Retro Studios, as well as the elusive David Wise, one of the most talented videogame composers around. News about any new games in the series may be hard to come by, but our huge ten-page feature should certainly keep you entertained in the meantime.

Aside from platforming primates, we also look behind the scenes of the acclaimed *Demon Attack*, reveal how Sensible Software crafted its Amiga strategy gem *Mega lo Mania* and explain how *BioShock* built on the foundations of *System Shock 2*.

That's not all. We also revisit the Screamer series, dive into *Shinobi III: Return Of The Ninja Master*, chat to Digital Eclipse's coding kings and reveal the best Amstrad CPC 464 games to start your collection. Oh, and don't forget our great subs offer for The C64 Mini on page 28.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

retro GAMER
THE EVOLUTION OF DONKEY KONG COUNTRY
THE HISTORY OF SCREAMER
STUDIO PROFILE: DIGITAL ECLIPSE
THE MAKING OF BIOSHOCK

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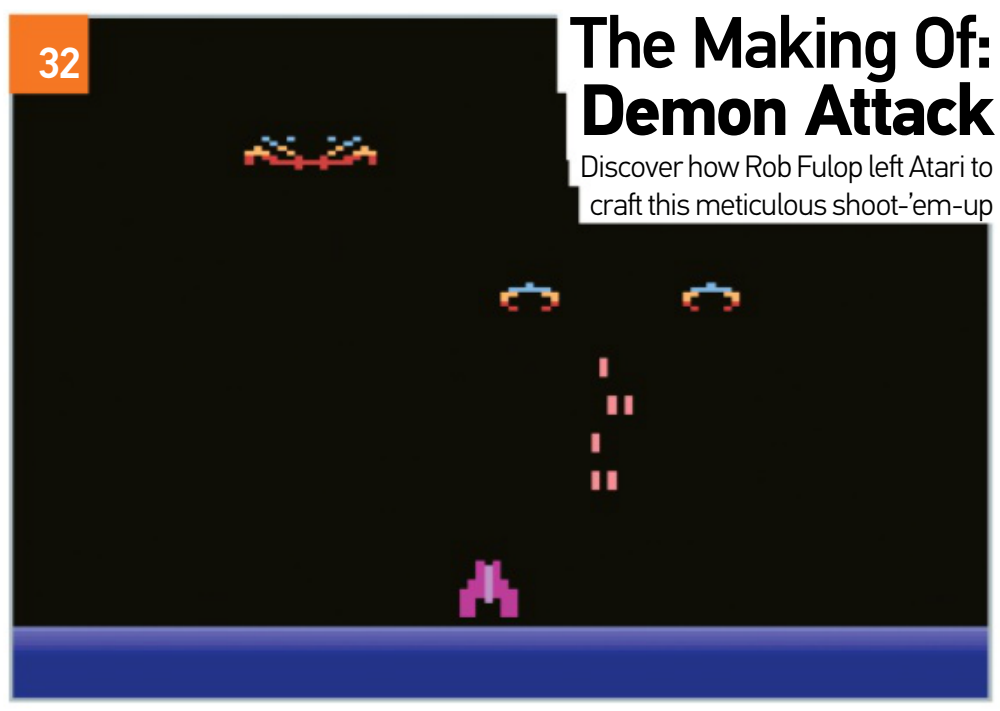
If you owned an Apple Macintosh, chances are you're very familiar with John's work. Here he talks all about it

The Evolution Of: Donkey Kong Country
Esteemed developers from Rare and Retro Studios recall the history behind Nintendo's popular platforming series



The Making Of: Demon Attack
Discover how Rob Fulop left Atari to craft this meticulous shoot-'em-up

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SEE PAGE 28

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ATARI TURNS 50

Donald Louie on how Atari is celebrating its 50th anniversary

» The Atari 2600 is one of seven systems that features on *Atari 50: The Anniversary Collection*.

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14 BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES
Nick braves the retro timelines to bring you the best news from yesteryear. He's good like that

The Atari brand has been synonymous with gaming since the early Seventies, so it's somewhat fitting that a new compilation is on the way. *Atari 50: The Anniversary Collection* is no ordinary compilation however, as it not only features an astonishing 90 games, but will also cover most of Atari's history, in a similar style to the excellent *Rare Replay*. The collection is being overseen by Digital Eclipse, a company that, along with M2, is one of the finest curators of classic games in the business.

According to Donald Louie, a producer at Atari, Digital Eclipse was "the obvious choice" for the prestigious project. "They are known for retro compilations, they have the technical skills to handle complex emulation, and they have an obvious affection for the Atari brand," he tells us. "Having the right partner was very important to us. If you look at the work they did on the *SNK 40th Anniversary Collection* and *Blizzard Arcade Collection*, you can see that they had great care and respect for the source material."

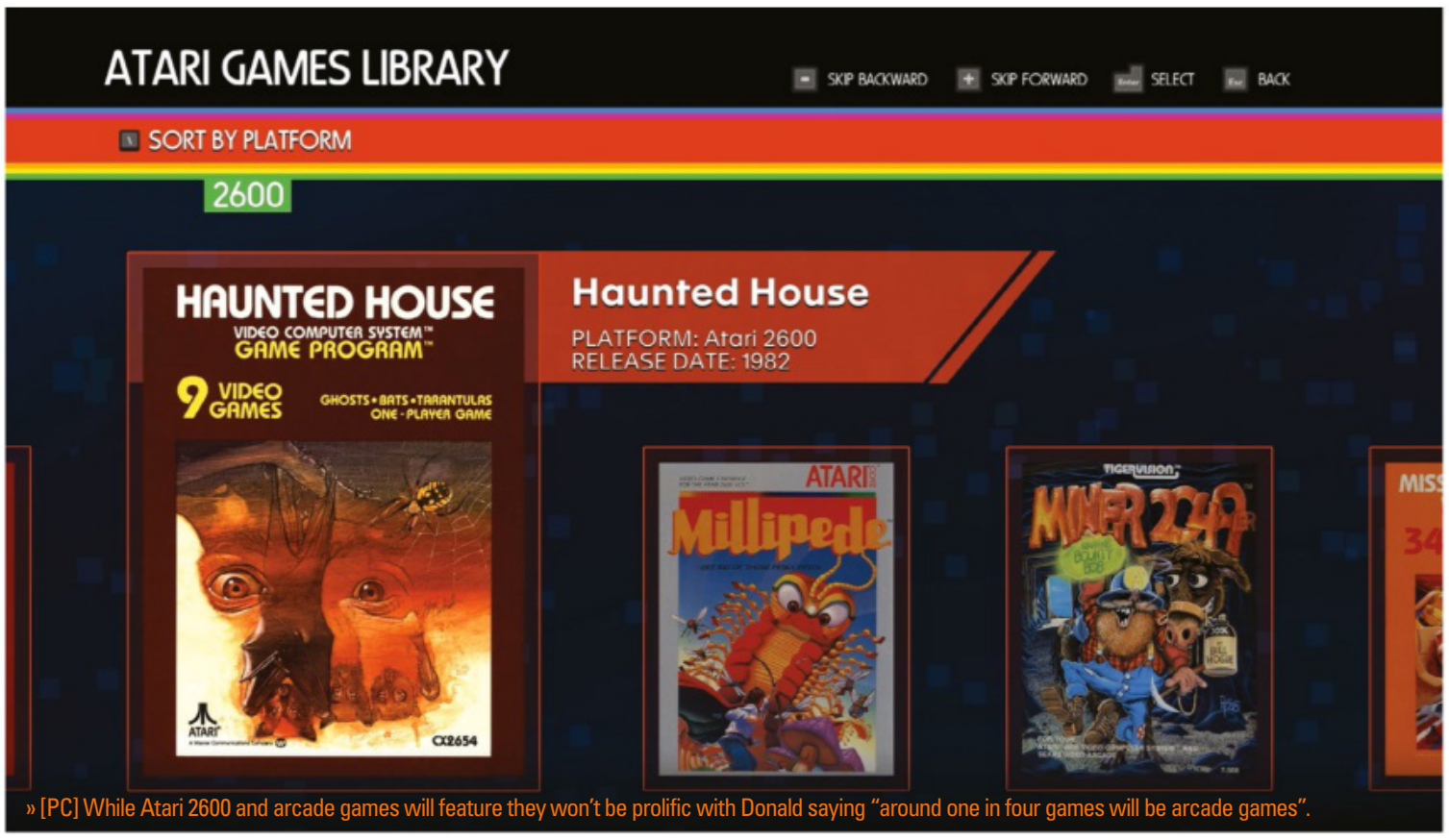
» [PC] You'll be able to learn about Atari's history while enjoying the publisher's many games.

» Donald Louie, a producer at Atari, is interested in playing *Swordquest: Airworld*.

Donald makes a good point. Digital Eclipse has made some astonishing compilations in recent years, not just focussing on the emulation of the games, but also the history behind them. "Chris Kohler, the editorial director at Digital Eclipse, is a published expert on the Golden Age of gaming," he continues. "He led the charge on the historical content, doing countless hours of research and unearthing rare assets. Atari is unique… no other gaming company would require emulation for seven different hardware platforms in order to build a single compilation. Getting all that emulation in one, seamless experience is a real technical achievement."

As impressive as it is to have seven different platforms represented (Rare's *Rare Replay* featured six) the sheer number of games is quite the feat as well. "We are telling the story of Atari in the Seventies, Eighties and Nineties through a combination of interviews, stories, artefacts and games," continues Donald. "The collection takes you through three decades of advancements in hardware and game design. There are a lot of stories to tell, and the games are the critical piece that brings those stories to life."

Atari was extremely prolific during this period and it's pleasing to see that beyond the typical arcade and Atari 2600 games we normally see, we'll also be able to experience games for the Lynx and Jaguar as well. Aside from recent Evercade Lynx compilations, both systems have stayed lost to the mists of time, so we were keen to know why it has taken the publisher so long to bring them back. "The Jaguar and Lynx were very unique hardware platforms,

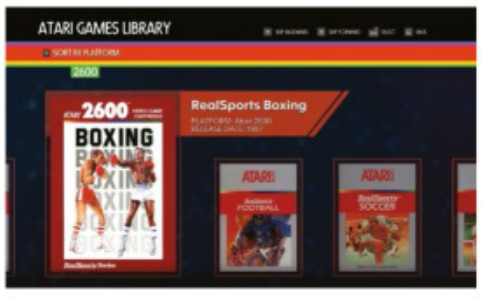


» [PC] While Atari 2600 and arcade games will feature they won't be prolific with Donald saying "around one in four games will be arcade games".

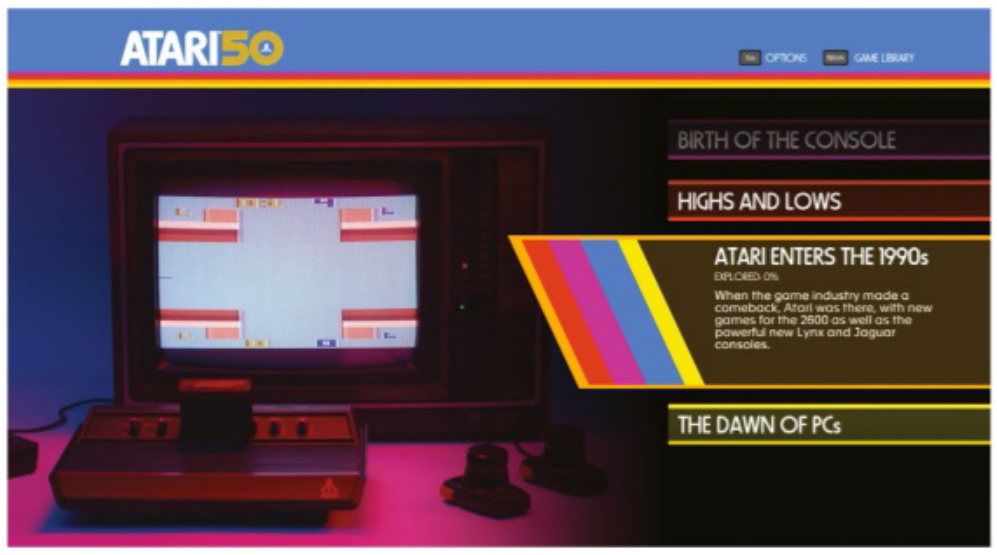
» [PC] Digital Eclipse is well-known for pushing the boundaries of compilations and its latest effort looks superb.

both in terms of their hardware engineering and the control inputs, which makes them very difficult to emulate," explains Donald. "Working with Jaguar titles is notoriously complicated. This has really dissuaded developers from taking on the work, despite the interest from players who want access to these games. This project created a natural opportunity for us to work with Digital Eclipse to make some of these great titles accessible again."

Included alongside Atari's many classic games will be six brand-new projects that either combine classic Atari games in exciting new ways, update old favourites or, in the case of *Swordquest: Airworld*, work as brand-new sequels. "The



» [PC] While plenty of classic games are included, we'll be surprised if licensed games like *ET* and later arcade games like *Gauntlet* and *Paperboy* will be included in the compilation.


ATARI50
OPTIONS
GAME LIBRARY
BIRTH OF THE CONSOLE
HIGHS AND LOWS
ATARI ENTERS THE 1990s
When the game industry made a comeback, Atari was there, with new games for the 2600 as well as the powerful new Lynx and Jaguar consoles.
THE DAWN OF PCs

» [PC] Donald says, "The full roster of games is not quite locked down yet, and it is hard to resist the temptation to add even more." That sounds good to us.

new games are a manifestation of how excited the Digital Eclipse team is about this project," Donald says. "It got their creative energy flowing, and the resulting work includes incredibly fun gameplay and some really interesting ideas. I am personally excited about the inclusion of *Swordquest: Airworld*, which is Digital Eclipse's take on the never-completed fourth game in the *Swordquest* series."

In addition to creating totally new gaming experiences, Digital Eclipse has also crafted five 'Interactive Timelines' that Donald hopes will be a valuable way for gamers to appreciate Atari's history. "The Interactive Timelines represent a unique way for fans to revisit these games, and for a new generation of players to experience them for the first time," he says. "There is nothing quite like hearing a game designer explain what was going on in his or her head, what was happening in the world around them, why they made the decisions they did and then immediately play the game. It completely changes the playing experience. We've got a huge list of games, lots of rare art and archival materials, and excellent interviews with some of the biggest names in the industry."

Digital Eclipse's new collection is certainly impressive, but so too is the sheer strength of the Atari name, and we were keen to know why Donald felt Atari still resonates with gamers today. "I have a lot of respect for how much Atari did to change home entertainment," he says. "Those early days were a blue ocean of opportunity for both success and failure. That dynamic, fearless approach launched an industry that plays an outsized role in our culture."

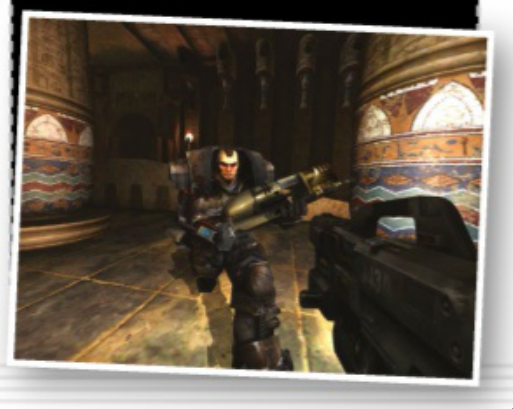
***Atari 50: The Anniversary Collection* is planned for November 2022. Expect a review soon.**

LEGO LEVELS UP

Not content with replicating the Atari VCS in Lego (see our review on page 94) Lego has also announced The Mighty Bowser, an impressive replica of Mario's famous foe. Built from 2,807 pieces and measuring 11.5 inches in height it promises to be quite the showpiece when it arrives this October. It's rather steep at £229.99, but poseable arms and fingers and the ability to launch fireballs suggest Lego is going all out.

XBOX LIVE LIVES AGAIN

The original Xbox offered some exceptional online experiences, but that all ended when Microsoft shut its servers down. Thankfully many of Xbox's greatest online games will be playable again as Xbox Live 1.0 is being resurrected courtesy of the fan project Insignia. A total of 13 games will be available at launch and will include the likes of *Crimson Skies*, *MechAssault*, *Counter-Strike* and *Unreal Championship*. More info at bit.ly/insigniaxbox



Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. Join him as he hosts a phone-in show and plays games at www.twitch.tv/iainlee and also check out www.patreon.com/iainandKatherine

Playground currency

When I was a kid, it was de rigueur to take 'things' into school to boost your social standing. For a while, bizarrely, it was books about Bruce Lee. God knows what a bunch of ten-year-olds who had never seen *Enter The Dragon* got out of looking at pics of Lee. I suspect it was the visceral thrill of knowing that he was the star of X-rated movies and was therefore inherently naughty. Of course, the boasts that 'my dad could beat Bruce Lee' rang throughout the playground. How much would I have loved to see a bunch of middle-aged Seventies dads scrapping with the Little Dragon.

There were other short fads – Rubik's Cubes, Looby Loos – but the longest-lasting was the handheld game. The first handheld I remember being brought in was the Tomy Digital Derby Auto Raceway. A black box with a tiny steering wheel that moved a small car left and right. I just went and watched a video of it, and it is WAY cooler than I remember. Cars would come up behind you and you had to avoid them. I'd forgotten you could change gears which made you move faster. Yes, the noise was migraine inducing, but it was so exciting. It felt like having an arcade cab in your hands. Paul Francis brought this in and for a while, he was king of the playground as we all gathered outside the toilets to have a go.

I needed a piece of this cool pie. At some point, I don't remember when, I got given the *Donkey Kong II* Game & Watch. Whereas Digital Raceway was just a black box, and looks a little plain today, *DKII* was and still is a design classic. One of the series of flip-top dual screens, the brown and cream colouring really made it stand out. Go and have a look now, you would want one of these on your shelf. A real work of art and so much better looking than the original *Donkey Kong* handheld – that orange case used to make me nauseous.

> "Yes, the noise was migraine inducing, but it was so exciting"

I spent so long on this game, although I'd be hard pushed to tell you what you had to do. In many ways, it didn't matter. Once I brought this into school, I was king. King Kong if you will. Kids would be gathered around me all break desperate to have a go. I do vaguely remember at one point charging kids a penny a pop. An awful, early example of me Gonching (check out Gonch from *Grange Hill*. The verb to Gonch comes directly from him).

Of course, this infamy couldn't last, and I was eventually knocked off the throne by the son of the caretaker who somehow brought an actual CB radio into the school playground. Anyone who grew up in the late Seventies will remember just how thrilling CBs were. If you don't believe me, go and watch *Stranger Things* and see how important they are to the world of Hawkins.

You can now get handhelds that hold 50,000 games. That's cool, but they will never be as thrilling as a chunky, brown and cream clamshell box from the Game & Watch series. ✱

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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THE PERFECT GIFT, EVERY TIME

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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

That belongs in a museum

As I'm writing this, it's a few days after my eldest daughter got married. I'm exhausted, frankly, because the morning after the wedding came the clean-up, and it went on for hours. They'd hired their local village hall for the wedding, and so it was on all of us to get the place back to normal by lunchtime the next day. No sleeping off the hangover for any of us. The main job, apart from ripping down the bunting, was disposing of the empty bottles and cleaning glasses. There was a real sense of deja-vu for me… but not because I'm one for big parties.

No, this familiarity came from a game. Specifically, as some of you will have guessed by now, 1984's *Jet Set Willy*. In that, Miner Willy is tasked with cleaning up the detritus of an epic party from the rooms of his chaotic, creature-infested mansion.

The history of the game, and its predecessor *Manic Miner*, will have been recounted in these pages, so you don't need me to recap it here. However, what struck me as I carried my hundredth empty Prosecco bottle to the now overflowing recycling bin was just how what I was doing felt like a game. We even had a time limit and, heck, if you include the dozen or so kids running around screaming, there were real monsters to avoid en route. And yes, I did perform a Quirkafleeg.

What did strike me, though, was just how beautifully subversive *Jet Set Willy* was, and how – for all its subversion and surreal humour – much maturity it displayed. Matthew Smith wasn't even in his 20s yet when he wrote his follow-up to *Manic Miner*, which makes the game even more of an achievement.

Then I began to think about how cleverly *Jet Set Willy* was a reaction to *Manic Miner*, and what a personal game it must've been for him. *Manic Miner* was an insane runaway hit. Written in just eight weeks, its success must've been like a freight train for Smith. That success led directly to *Jet Set Willy*, which could be seen as one giant metaphor. You simply don't get that with modern games, and their huge teams and algorithmic ticking of boxes. Yes, the spirit is preserved in many indie games, but *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy* weren't underground hits. They were the AAA games of their day.

I suspect that this approach of life influencing art would've continued had Smith completed the third game in the trilogy. The Mega Tree was often jokingly referred to by Smith as *Miner Willy Meets The Taxman…*

When I say art, I mean art. *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy* are, in the truest sense, expressions of one person's inner world. When people ponder whether games can be art, I can think of no better examples. Modern games may hit us over the head with a sort of contrived aesthetic beauty – I've marvelled at many an open-world sunset – but they miss the unique splurge of emotions, desires, and thoughts that Matthew Smith's classic games represent. Let's hang them in the Tate. *

> "And yes, I did perform a Quirkafleeg"

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*ART NOT FINAL

LOVE
I made lunch, would you like to eat it?
You seem to be in a good mood.
I'm happy to be with you. What about you, Kent?
What would you like to do?

IDEA FACTORY

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Zapped To The Past

Adrian Mills on co-creating the excellent C64-themed podcast

» [C64] Adrian is a big fan of *Paradroid*, revealing, "The level of detail and thought in that game still amazes me today."

Commodore 64 owners are certainly being well catered for at the moment. In addition to the resurrection of *Zzap!64* and the long-running *Freeze 64*, there's also the fun podcast *Zapped To The Past* to enjoy. Created by Adrian Mills and Graham Raddings it's a delightful listen where the two friends revisit every issue of *Zzap!64*. Here we find out from Adrian how it all came about.

Why choose to focus on the C64?

It was our main computer through the Eighties, so we had a good knowledge of the software at the time.

How long have you and Graham known each other?

For over 30 years, first meeting around a *Dungeons & Dragons* poster, then collaborating on a demo for Graham's demo group S-Xpress.

Has is it been useful framing your episodes with past issues of *Zzap!64*?

Very useful! The idea was always to do a timeline of releases and do all games released, not just the usual big hitters. The fact that everything from May 1985 was documented in a magazine gave us the schedule to build the podcast around, as actual release dates were hard to find.

How long does a typical episode take to create?

Around three to four hours to record – then a further four to produce. Creating them takes longer as we need to play every game and it takes about a day to get through them all. Then there is the research into music, films and TV each week. The main challenge is finding the time to fit it all in along with full-time jobs, families etc.

Are any of your episodes scripted beforehand?

One of us will write the main review for the game and the other will offer secondary comments. These are usually written so that we cover all the details that we need to talk about. After that, everything is ad-libbed. Examples like Eighties collect-a-thons being reflective of capitalist/consumerist society and dusty James Bond have all just sprung up organically as we record them.

» Adrian Mills loves the C64 and has created *Zapped To The Past* with his friend Graham Raddings.

» Graham Raddings loves *Maniac Mansion* on the C64 calling it, "An actual redefining moment in adventure games."

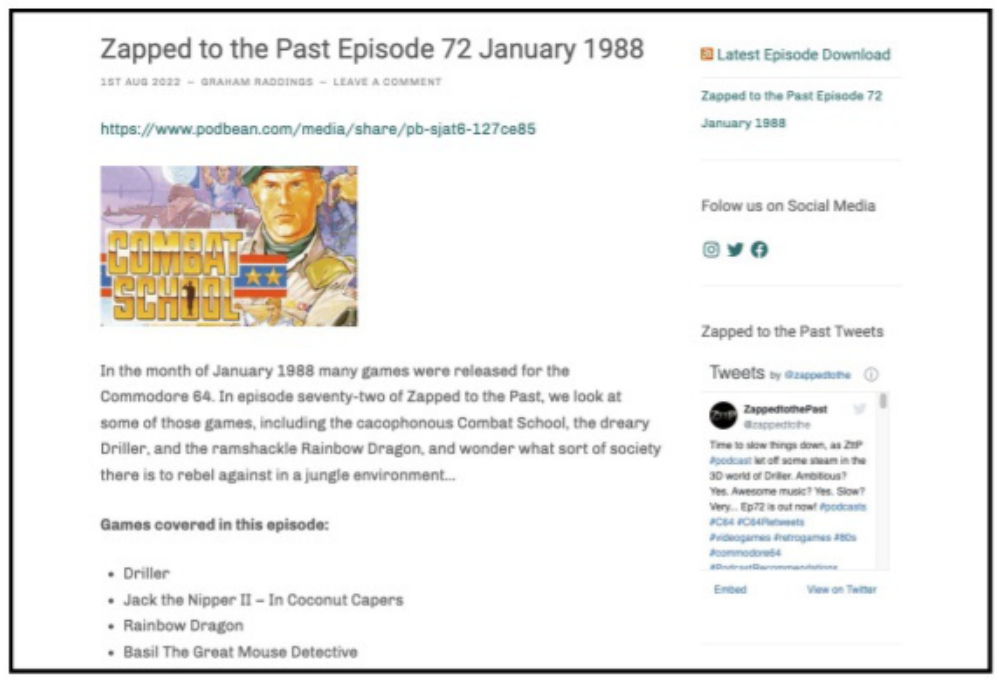
You don't usually have special guests. Why is this?

We've interviewed Jon Hare and Chris Abbott, but those were on our Patreon. It mainly comes down to time. Releasing weekly, our schedule rarely fits around others to get them on. In the future, when the number of games reduces, it's certainly something we want to have more of.

What separates your podcast from similar retro shows?

The remit is different to a lot of other shows. It's not just one game picked by the hosts or Twitter, it's every game as it was released and reviewed. We have no say over the content. We're

» Even *Zapped To The Past*'s logo should offer a good whiff of nostalgia.


Zapped to the Past Episode 72 January 1988
1ST AUG 2022 – GRAHAM RADDINGS – LEAVE A COMMENT
https://www.podbean.com/media/share/pb-sjat6-127ce85
COMBAT SCHOOL
In the month of January 1988 many games were released for the Commodore 64. In episode seventy-two of Zapped to the Past, we look at some of those games, including the cacophonous Combat School, the dreary Driller, and the ramshackle Rainbow Dragon, and wonder what sort of society there is to rebel against in a jungle environment...
Games covered in this episode:
Driller
Jack the Nipper II – In Coconut Capers
Rainbow Dragon
Basil The Great Mouse Detective
Latest Episode Download
Zapped to the Past Episode 72 January 1988
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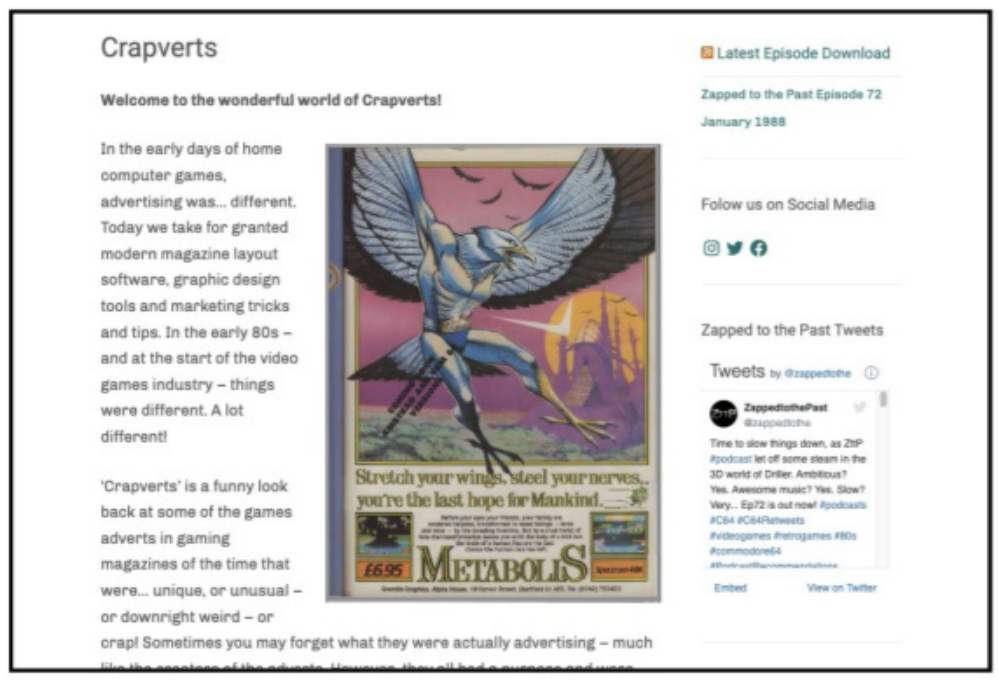
Tweets by @zappedtothe

» Each episode gives you a nice breakdown of what games will be covered.


Crapverts
Welcome to the wonderful world of Crapverts!
In the early days of home computer games, advertising was... different. Today we take for granted modern magazine layout software, graphic design tools and marketing tricks and tips. In the early 80s – and at the start of the video games industry – things were different. A lot different!
'Crapverts' is a funny look back at some of the games adverts in gaming magazines of the time that were... unique, or unusual – or downright weird – or crap! Sometimes you may forget what they were actually advertising – much
Stretch your wings, steel your nerves... you're the last hope for Mankind.
£6.95
METABOLIS
Latest Episode Download
Zapped to the Past Episode 72 January 1988
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Tweets by @zappedtothe

» Crapverts is a section of the website where Adrian and Graham highlight terrible box art.

just documenting a time period. No one wants to play some of the games we have had to cover, but it was the outline of the podcast from the very beginning. We play them so you don't have to.

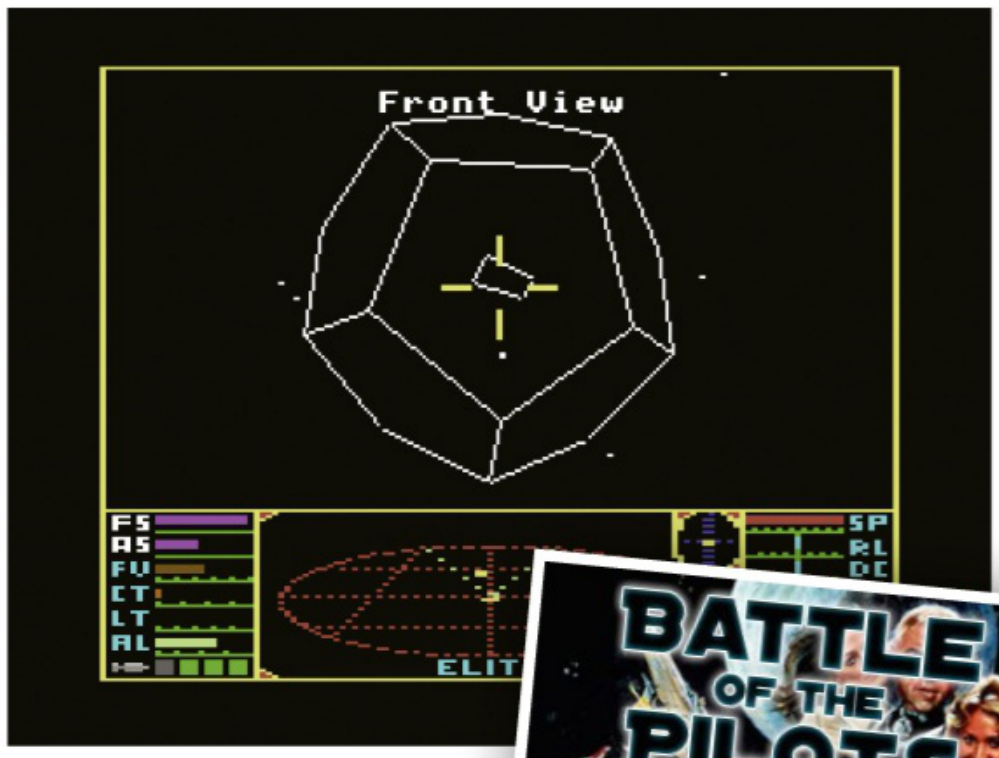
You've a lot of love for the original *Zzap!64*. What did you like about it?

It was my games bible back then, and I kind of idolised Rignall and Penn. They were just role models to me at the age of 13 to 15. It was a masterstroke that they were chosen to do the reviews and putting them front and centre of the magazine sold it to me. There was also the sense that they were honest. When they said something was awful, that was that. Gary Penn's review of *Fist II* and his editorial against licensed games were game changers in how I looked at games journalism.

You can be quite critical of classic games, do you get many complaints?

We did at first, but we don't so much now. Having *Elite* as our inaugural review, which neither of us ever really liked, was always going to seem a little controversial, but it was our honest opinion upon replay. We always try to offer a solid rationale around why we do not like something, even if that game is lauded. We try to separate the technical achievement from the way it may play. *Mercenary* is another good example of that, and we have also just covered *Driller*, which also falls into that ballpark. Are these games still enjoyable now?

» [C64] Games like *Elite* will be criticised if they're not liked, but the criticism is always fair.



» *Battle Of The Pilots* is a spin-off show focussing on TV and film from the Seventies and Eighties.

You can go back and still enjoy *Super Mario Bros*, *Driller*… not so much.

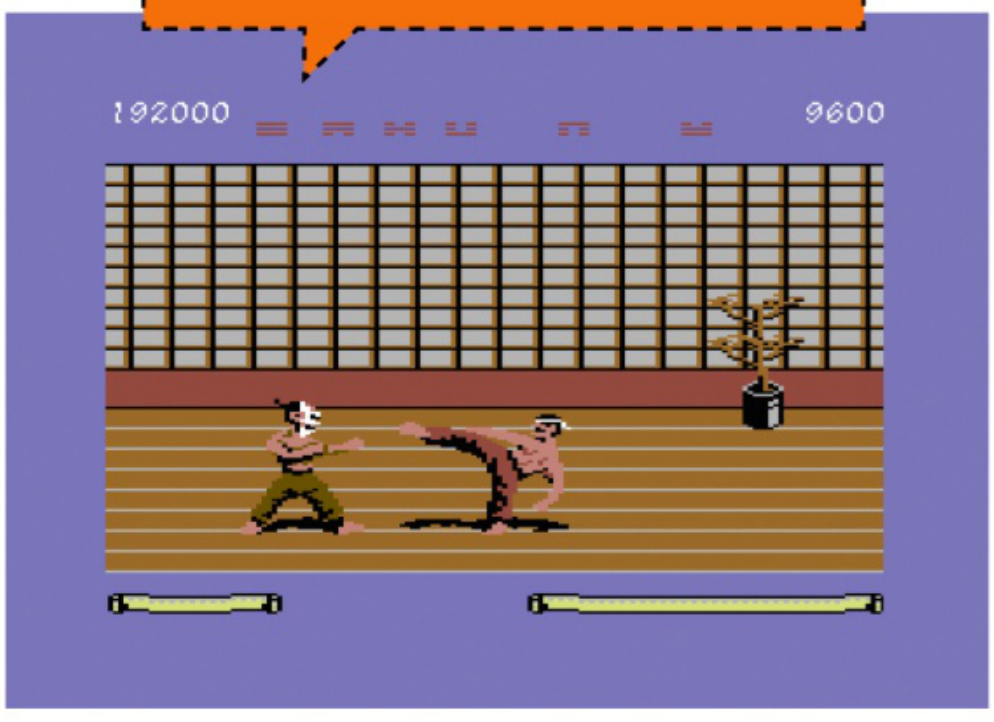
Why do you think *Zapped To The Past* has struck a chord with people?

We're guessing that people see that we know each other and enjoy our frequent tangents on certain subjects. We do not take it all too seriously, so we do try to be entertaining as well. Then there's the subject matter and that we are covering all games. We've had so many comments from people about forgotten games or games they have never heard of. Some of the more obtuse games getting 40% in issue 22 of *Zzap*… Who remembers those? Each game deserves its re-review. It may also be our love of Roger Moore. ✱

Head to zappedtothepast.com to learn more about Adrian and Graham's entertaining podcast.

» Adrian and Graham revisit every issue of *Zzap!64* and play all the reviewed games.

> "Creating them takes longer as we need to play every game"
>
> **ADRIAN MILLS**



» [C64] Gary Penn's scathing review of *Fist II* left a big impression on Adrian.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

DECEMBER 2005 – The Xbox 360 is here, and a whole bunch of sequels have arrived with it. Find out what the UK press made of those, plus all the other big games vying for your Christmas cash in 2005, as Nick Thorpe juices up the time machine again

» [PSP] Perhaps unsurprisingly, *Liberty City Stories* would become the best-selling PSP game of all time.

NEWS DECEMBER 2005

Trading of shares in specialist magazine publisher Highbury House was suspended on 15 December, as the company faced mounting debts. The company had already sold many of its titles to Future Publishing earlier in 2005, after a full buy out was referred to the Competition Commission over concerns about dominance of the gaming magazine sector. The fate of magazines such as *games™* and *Play*, as well as other titles such as *Front* and *Hotdog*, hung in the balance.

On 11 December, explosions at the Hertfordshire Oil Storage Terminal in Buncefield caused the largest fire in peacetime Europe, leading to the evacuation of nearby homes and disruption to businesses. The fire burned until 13 December, and a smoke cloud was visible from London and Essex. Thankfully there were no deaths as a direct result of the incident.

On 19 December, the Civil Partnership Act 2004 came into force, with Shannon Sickles and Grainne Close registering the UK's first civil partnership in Belfast. The law granted same sex couples a legally recognised civil union, and afforded similar rights to those of married heterosexual couples, without being formally recognised as marriage.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM DECEMBER 2005

High-definition gaming has arrived in the UK with the launch of the Xbox 360, though if you managed to snag one in time for Christmas, you were very lucky indeed. BBC News described the machine as "virtually sold out" on launch day, and quoted Asda's non-food director Tony Page as saying, "As predicted, we counted them in and counted them out quick as a flash. Someone at Microsoft seriously needs their ears Xboxing for failing to give us enough to go round." Over 200 eager customers braved the cold, rainy weather for a midnight launch at Game's Oxford Street branch, and those who waited until dawn generally found themselves out of luck.

After the *Official Xbox 360 Magazine* got its hands on early games last month, everyone else gets to review them this month. *Project Gotham Racing 3* was in pole position, earning 10/10 from *XBM*, 9/10 from *X360*, 9/10 from *games™* and 9/10 from the *Official Xbox 360 Magazine*. In a 9/10 review, *Edge* noted that it "hasn't moved from its niche, not at all", but that it had been "transformed into a wondrous and rewarding beauty spot". Other highlights included Sega's horror game Condemned: Criminal Origins (8/10 *XBM*, 8/10 *X360*, 7/10 *games™*, 6/10 *Edge*) and Rare's platformer *Kameo: Elements Of Power* (8/10 *X360*, 7/10 *XBM*, 7/10 *Edge*, 7/10 *games™*). Many of the best reviewed games were sequels, including *Call Of Duty 2* (9/10 *XBM*, 8/10 *X360*, 7/10 *Edge*), *NBA Live 06* (9/10 *XBM*, 8/10 *X360*), *Amped 3* (9/10 *Official 360*, 7/10 *XBM*, 7/10 *X360*) and Ridge Racer 6 (8/10 *XBM*, 7/10 *games™*, 6/10 *Official 360*).

» [Xbox 360] If you bought *Condemned* with your console, the perfect accessory was fresh pants.

But what about those on the old consoles? Well, there were the delights of *Star Wars Battlefront II*, which *Official PS2* described as

a "rollicking, if flawed, *Star Wars* combat game" in an 8/10 review (9.0/10 *OXM*, 8/10 *games™*). Rockstar's more unusual film licence *The Warriors* earned 7/10 in *games™* for a "heady concoction" of "story, nostalgia and out-and-out combat" (7/10 *XBM*). The action adventure adaptation of *Peter Jackson's King Kong* also did surprisingly well, getting 9/10 from *Official PS2* for being "imaginatively designed" (8/10 *Edge*, 79% *NGC*). *Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones* drew the *Sands Of Time* trilogy to a close, earning 9/10 from *Official PS2* for being able to "combine amazing feats of physical exertion with furious fighting" (9.2/10 *OXM*, 7/10 *Edge*).

Of course, that's before we get into the platform exclusives. *Half-Life 2*'s brilliance arrived intact on Xbox, earning 9.8/10 from *Official Xbox Magazine* for being "practically flawless". Xbox owners also got *Ninja Gaiden Black* and *Fable: The Lost Chapters*, improved updates of past hits. On the PS2, *Soulcalibur III* got 8/10 in *Edge* as it excelled in "all the ways that are truly important to its genre" (9/10 *Official PS2*, 8/10 *games™*).

Ratchet: Gladiator got 7/10 in *Official PS2* for combat that felt "one note" without exploration elements (7/10 *Edge*), while *Sly 3: Honour Among Thieves* got 9/10 in the same magazine for a "constant flow of ideas." Over on the GameCube, *Fire Emblem: Path Of Radiance* earned 91% from *NGC* for being "tough, engaging and even a little emotional" and *Battalion Wars* got 9.0/10 from *Cube* for being a "perfect combination of face-in-the-mud action and on-the-fly strategy" (90% *NGC*, 7/10 *Edge*).

Handheld gamers had plenty to enjoy too. *Mario Kart DS* brought online play to Nintendo's famous franchise, with *Edge* describing it as "slick, easy, safe and free" in an 8/10 review (5/5 *NGC*, 9.1/10 *Cube*). PSP owners got their taste of 3D crime in *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories*, which got 9/10 in *Official PS2* and was described as "the new yardstick against which every future PSP title will be measured" (8/10 *Edge*). On the other side of the law, *Pursuit Force* got 7/10 in both *Edge* and *games™*, with the latter praising it for playing like a movie but criticising it as "horribly difficult".

Join us again next month, when the year of the Wii and PS3 begins. ✱

» [DS] Online gaming on a Nintendo console? And it's good? Wow, 2005 is the future.

» [PS2] It's hard to live long and prosper in *Battlefront II*'s chaotic war zones.

» [Xbox 360] Project Gotham Racing 3 was easily the star of the UK Xbox 360 launch games.

CHARTS

DECEMBER 2005

PLAYSTATION 2

1 – Star Wars Battlefront II (LucasArts)
2 – Pro Evolution Soccer 5 (Konami)
3 – FIFA 06 (EA)
4 – Resident Evil 4 (Capcom)
5 – The Warriors (Rockstar)

XBOX

1 – Pro Evolution Soccer 5 (Konami)
2 – The Warriors (Rockstar)
3 – Star Wars Battlefront II (LucasArts)
4 – FIFA 06 (EA)
5 – Far Cry Instincts (Ubisoft)

GAMECUBE

1 – Ultimate Spider-Man (Activision)
2 – FIFA 06 (EA)
3 – Spartan: Total Warrior (Sega)
4 – SSX On Tour (EA)
5 – WWE: Day Of Reckoning 2 (THQ)

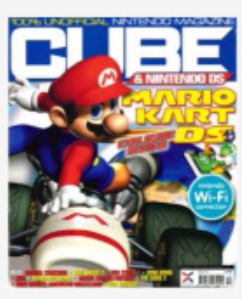
MUSIC

1 – That's My Goal (Shayne Ward)
2 – JCB Song (Nizlopi)
3 – Fairytale Of New York (The Pogues ft Kirsty MacColl)
4 – When You Tell Me That You Love Me (Westlife ft Diana Ross)
5 – When I'm Gone (Eminem)

THIS MONTH IN...

Xbox 360: The Official Magazine

"If you're a die-hard and quite old *Sonic* fan, *Shadow The Hedgehog* will probably disappoint," says a 7.0/10 review. "This is more of the same thing [as *Sonic Heroes*] only with loads more stuff to do – and guns!" Very generous indeed.



Cube

"*Cube* has always been first when it comes to all the big Capcom news, and we're set to continue that record with the DS," says *Cube*, hyping a preview of *Resident Evil: Deadly Silence* that never arrives as issue 53 never sees shelves.

Retro Gamer

"Here at **Retro Gamer** we're absolutely committed to the retro cause and want to give you, the reader, a lavish publication that you'll be proud to display on your coffee table," says Darran Jones, editor of the relaunched **Retro Gamer**.

Myth: History In The Making

SPECTRUM WINS AGAIN

» ZX SPECTRUM » 1989 » SYSTEM 3

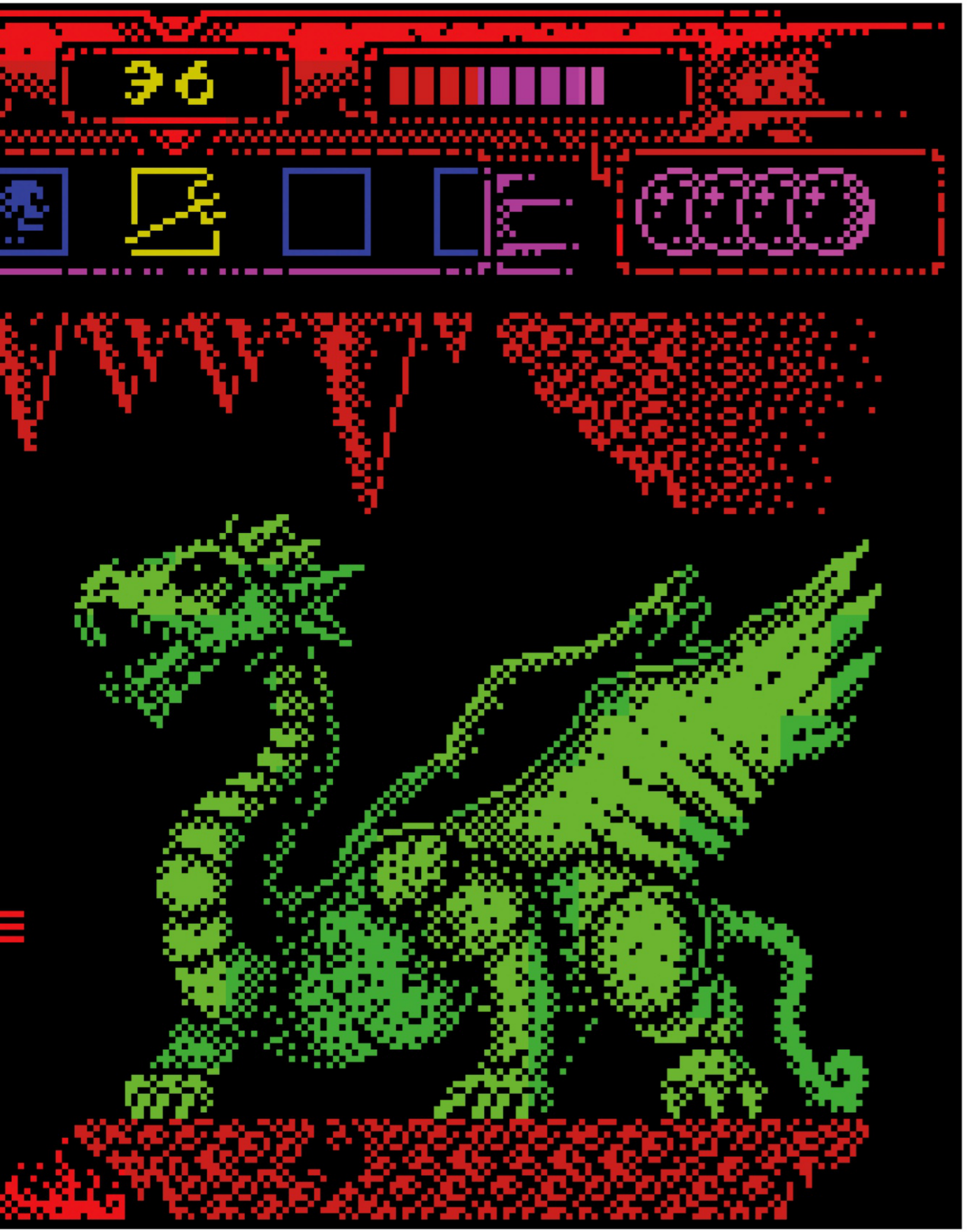
***Brooklyn Nine-Nine*'s Adrian Pimento may have described jealousy as "the hottest emotion", but he clearly never owned an Amstrad growing up.** It was anger, not desire that shaped my jealousy as a teenager and it was typically directed at friends with Spectrums.

As an Amstrad owner it often felt like the games I bought were afterthoughts and it always seemed like the Spectrum versions were better. Obviously that wasn't true, but that's how it seemed and it's something I felt quite keenly when I experienced *Myth: History In The Making* for the first time.

Myth on the Spectrum is simply gorgeous to look at. The sprite design is immense, it has nice animation throughout and its bosses (like this dragon here) are absolutely gigantic. Sure the C64 version is probably the ultimate 8-bit edition, but I love the clean stylish look of the Spectrum version and I ended up purchasing it.

Sadly, *Myth* on the Amstrad is not good. Whereas *Myth* on the C64 and Spectrum make the most of each system's respective hardware, *Myth* on the CPC is another lazy port. Yes it's detailed at times, but the colour schemes are garish and naff-looking and it just doesn't excite me like the Spectrum version does.

It obviously plays OK but I remember being massively disappointed with it at the time and I soon sold my copy. Ultimately, I never really got very far into *Myth* due to only playing it at my friend's house, but I was always mesmerised by just how good it looked on the humble Speccy. Here's the thing though. I had already owned my Amstrad for two years by the time *Myth* arrived, so you would have thought that I'd have been used to such sloppy ports, but no, the truth would always hurt. And if I'm really honest, it still hurts a bit now.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THE EVOLUTION OF DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

SO VISUALLY IMPRESSIVE THAT THOSE AT ITS LAUNCH THOUGHT IT WAS AN N64 TITLE, DONKEY KONG COUNTRY BREATHED LIFE BACK INTO THE AGEING SNES. FORMER AND CURRENT RARE AND RETRO STUDIOS DEVELOPERS REVIEW THE CLASSIC PLATFORMER AND THE SERIES IT INSPIRED

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

» [SNES] Like his Eighties coin-op predecessor, DK has a barrel attack in *Donkey Kong Country*.

» [SNES] There are all sorts of barrels in *Donkey Kong Country*, including some that act as cannons!

If there's a common thread that runs through Rare's early output, it's that it could work miracles on less than state-of-the-art hardware. *Knight Lore*, for example, ran on the humble Spectrum, and then the *Wizards And Warriors* series and *Battletoads* redefined what was possible on the NES and Game Boy. But far from mere technical achievements, these titles were also object lessons in compelling platforming.

Donkey Kong Country continued this trend in the mid-Nineties, by coaxing the SNES into displaying 3D-rendered visuals created on advanced SGI workstations. At that point in time, nobody knew how to do this, but Rare artist Kevin Bayliss accepted the challenge. "I was focussed on creating a 3D ape character that looked believable," Kevin ponders, "but it was a little bit daunting, because it just hadn't been done before, and I hadn't really got to grips with the Alias PowerAnimator software yet! Many test models were made to ensure we could create all of the moves that had been set by the designers. But I just wanted to make sure DK could beat his chest, slap the floor and perform the basics – but like a mountain gorilla. So I studied videos of apes intensely for a few weeks, and did my best to mimic some of the things I watched them do."

As well as real-life primates, Rare naturally looked to the Eighties coin-op that it had been tasked with updating to inform the mechanics of its SNES platformer. "We chose barrels as a nod back to the original *Donkey Kong* arcade game," Kevin acknowledges. "He obviously loved playing with them, and so it just made sense to keep this prop as a key element. We also wanted to have a constant throughout the game that was easily recognisable and worked well in a small compact space. Barrels stood out nicely on the backgrounds, and they had many uses – such as methods of transport and 'banana storage'. So it was just a great idea to use them."

Another great idea came from Donkey Kong's creator and owner, but it left the specifics to Kevin, who listened to Rare's designers but then went his own way. "I think we were asked to add a sidekick character by Nintendo, but rather than use Donkey Kong Jr it wanted a new kid on the block," Kevin explains. "There didn't seem much point in having a character that was similar in build to DK with the same moves and characteristics, and the design team wanted to add a much more agile character with a characteristic that would allow him or her to perform unique moves. The suggestion was to have a spider monkey – something with

» [SNES] Whereas DK is slow but strong in *Donkey Kong Country*, Diddy is fast and agile.

"I JUST WANTED TO MAKE SURE DK COULD BEAT HIS CHEST, SLAP THE FLOOR AND PERFORM THE BASICS – BUT LIKE A MOUNTAIN GORILLA"

KEVIN BAYLISS

» Kevin Bayliss created *Donkey Kong Country*'s concept art – he's online at twitch.tv/Kev_Bayliss_KBTV

» The head programmer on *DKC* and *DKC 2*, Chris Sutherland also provided vocals for the two games.

» After play testing *DKL* and *DKC 2*, Paul Weaver worked as a designer on *Donkey Kong Country 3*.

» While at Retro Studios, Kynan Pearson was the senior designer on *Donkey Kong Country Returns*.

» *DKC Returns* art director Vince Joly went on to be the creative director of *DKC Tropical Freeze*.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

DONKEY KONG LAND

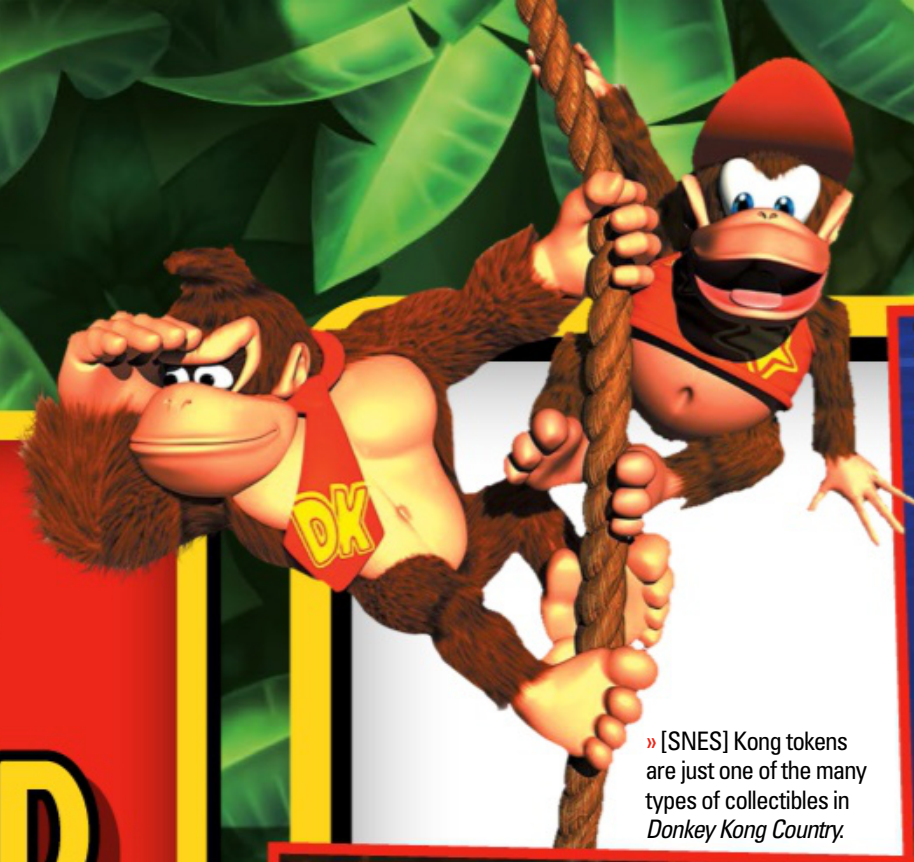
PAUL MACHACEK REVISITS THE HANDHELD DONKEY KONG COUNTRY SPIN-OFF

How did the Game Boy's screen affect *DKL*'s boss fights?
We had to make what happened more predictable. Having consistency of movement and regularity of actions allowed fast gameplay to be packed into a small and difficult to discern view, while also helping to manage the difficulty of the experience.

Why did *DKL* have a giant-clam boss?
Admittedly clams don't attack in real life, but we improvised, and had this one spit out an unrealistic abundance of pearls! There was a consistent rhythm to the pearl spitting and clam movement so that you could become familiar with it and learn how to beat it.

How about *DKL*s flying pig, which occasionally doubled as a platform?
It was a nice asset that someone made, and we just randomly put it in to mix things up. There weren't too many places where we needed a moving 'pig-platform', so I guess it was just a little detail and we moved on.

Why was *DKL*'s ostrich buddy able to dispatch foes, unlike in *DKC*?
Trying to avoid a suddenly appearing baddy with DK on an ostrich on a small screen would just have been too difficult. So it was to alleviate that, and give more options to progress without dying. It was also a nice addition to the character, given we had the freedom to move the franchise forward.



» [SNES] Kong tokens are just one of the many types of collectibles in *Donkey Kong Country*.

» Coder Paul Machacek adapted and expanded on aspects of *DKC* for the handheld spin-off *Donkey Kong Land*.

a long tail. I guess Diddy looked nothing like one of those, but he was certainly a monkey."

As well as DK and Diddy, Kevin was also tasked with producing concept art for 'animal buddies' for the pair to ride on, and so he set about sketching exotic creatures. "I was given a quick brief from Gregg Mayles," Kevin recalls. "He asked for 'scribbles' – the old term for concept art! – of characters that would behave in certain ways based on the environments that had been planned. So I scribbled down some ideas: a rhino, a tree frog and an ostrich. They were then taken by the artists on the *DKC* team, and they created Rambi, Winky and Expresso. It's amazing how well they turned out given the terrible scribbles I produced, but that was all that was needed to get the idea across."

Not content with giving *Donkey Kong Country* a cast of secondary characters, Rare decided to add sidequests based on collecting various items, such as coins, bananas and balloons. "We always tried to add additional layers, and to give players something else to aim for," Kevin points out. "We wanted a good variety of collectables, so some of the items would unlock or give special powers, or add additional points or kudos. Because we had rendering technology at our fingertips we could produce textures that looked like rubber and gold,

» [SNES] *Donkey Kong Country*'s animal buddies help the Kongs to make progress through certain stages.

"I LIKED THE SPIDER, BECAUSE THERE WAS THE IDEA THAT YOU COULD CUSTOMISE YOUR ROUTE BY CHOOSING WHERE YOU WERE GOING TO PROGRESS TO"

CHRIS SUTHERLAND

and we could also produce all kinds of special effects. So making a balloon that looked realistic and popped out from the environment was easy."

Thanks to its stunning rendered visuals, shifting copies of *Donkey Kong Country* was similarly simple – in fact, it set a record for being the fastest-selling videogame. Its sequel kept Diddy and swapped DK for Dixie, a ponytailed relative whose helicopter-like hovering made life easier as long as she was in play, as coder Chris Sutherland notes. "It was a cool feature that I'm glad was in there," Chris says. "But there was a lot of extra QA in order to make sure that every permutation was possible, because we didn't just have to do QA for the different ways you could be left in a level with one particular character when you were a *single* player, you also had multiplayer as well. I suppose it added a bit of strategy in terms of thinking which character should I play *here*? Because if you got hit then it would be nigh on impossible to complete the next section."

Responsible for coding the play mechanics for *Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest*, but not implementing them, Chris often found himself trying to make the impossible requests of the designers on his team possible. "Often the designers would come up with fiendish combinations of things that the coders hadn't thought of in the first place," Chris sighs. "Like the barrels. We had defined those individually, but then the designers would combine them in all sorts of weird and convoluted ways. Or in the roller-coaster stages you would have these fake-out sections, where you thought you were going to go *here*, but no, you went somewhere else!"

Given how popular the animal friends had been in *Donkey Kong Country*, its follow-up naturally revisited the concept, and one new buddy could spin their own platforms. "I liked the spider, because there was the idea that you could customise your route by choosing where you were going to progress to," Chris reflects. "You could also get to secret areas by going up high, and places that other characters couldn't get to. But there was a lot of balancing, because we wanted to make it so that it was still challenging. That was why there was a limit on the frequency that you could spit platforms out, and also the fact that they faded away after a while, meaning you had to jump before they dissolved."

If anyone had thought *Donkey Kong Country* might have been a novelty, then this idea was soon dispelled by its sequel's impressive sales. Rare soon rolled onto a third title, starring Dixie but not Diddy, and introducing toddler Kiddy, ▶

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: DONKEY KONG LAND 2

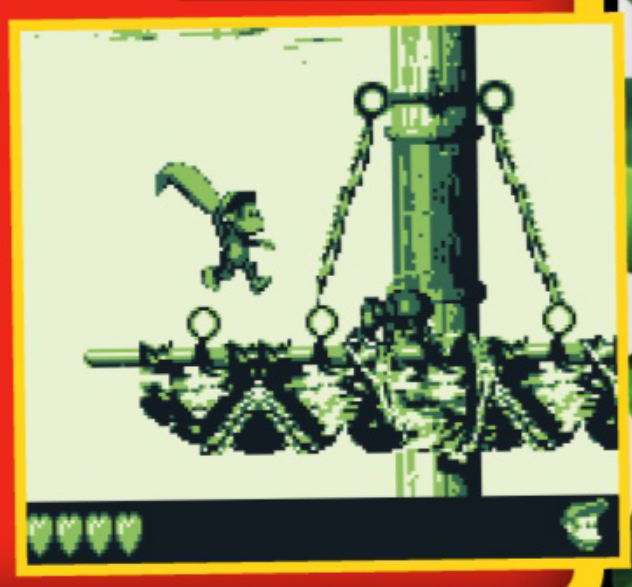
LEE SCHUNEMAN ON DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2'S PORTABLE COUNTERPART

» The portable *DKC 2* variant *Donkey Kong Land 2* was Lee Schuneman's first design project at Rare.

What was your role on *Donkey Kong Land 2*?
It was my first game-design project. A software engineer called Rob Harrison had built this level editor on a Silicon Graphics machine, and an artist, Dean Smith, had taken the *Donkey Kong Country 2* graphics and turned them into greyscale versions. I was given the level creation tool, told to make levels that had the flavour of the SNES version and hurry the fuck up. But in a nice way!

How challenging were the levels to design?
My first attempt was like Mario, and Gregg Mayles was like, "No, no, no. That's not *Donkey Kong Country*." Because it was more about how you *flowed* through the levels. So once he nudged me in the right direction I started designing them more for that seamless flow, so that you could just quickly go through them.

How did things go after that?
I was working maybe not 24/7, but remember I had bugger all else to do – I was living in the middle of nowhere. I had a deadline to get all of the levels done, and six months later it came out, and it sold a million copies. I remember being back in my hometown, and being able to tell a bunch of my old school buddies, "Hey! Look what I've done. I've made this game!"



STAGES OF EVOLUTION:
DONKEY KONG LAND III

GARY RICHARDS DISCUSSES THE ON-THE-GO VARIANT OF DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 3

How did you approach the design of *Donkey Kong Land III*?

The same people were playing our games on the Game Boy and the SNES, so there was a management decision to give us free rein to come up with fresh takes on the ideas in *Donkey Kong Country 3*, which was my favourite in the trilogy. So it was just a case of working out how we could create an experience that people would find familiar but different.

» Having helped out with *DKL 2*'s level designs, Gary Richards was asked to design *Donkey Kong Land 3*.

How did its unique Ellie The Elephant level come about?

Since you weren't refilling its trunk all the time then we made it into a stage where you were going along taking out the enemies with a 'water gun'. It was nice to get a mix of different game styles in there. I'd never had the chance of doing a shoot-'em-up, but I could kind of sneak one in at that point.

What was designing the game's greyscale levels like?

It was a big compromise to make something on the Game Boy that you could see and play properly despite the screen. We moved on to the Virtual Boy after that, which was much worse! We knew it wasn't going to sell as soon as we saw it. We did look at getting *Donkey Kong Country* on to it at one point, but nothing ever came out.

» [SNES] Dixie Kong can use her ponytail much like a helicopter rotor in *Donkey Kong Country 2*.

» [SNES] The bramble-covered stages in *Donkey Kong Country 2* are renowned for their difficulty.

» [SNES] Animal buddy Squawks The Parrot is the protagonist of a *Donkey Kong Country 2* boss-fight.

who thanks to designer Paul Weaver could bounce across water. "We could obviously have gone with DK or Diddy," Paul concedes, "but we wanted to extend the family, and also be very thoughtful about what we could add to the gameplay. When we started scratching off mechanics in the previous two games it became a real challenge to keep things fresh and interesting. But we had a range of age going all the way up to Cranky Kong, so we thought we would go in the other direction. Then since Kiddy was a bouncing baby boy we took that literally!"

Besides its amusing new player character, *Donkey Kong Country 3: Dixie Kong's Double Trouble!* also toyed with other genres and 3D gameplay, although the latter was restricted to the follow-up's bonus levels. "The map screens added an over-world concept to things, so rather than just following a line we wanted to make it like a treasure map that you explored," Paul recollects. "That was about trying to infuse really light RPG elements into the game – I was a huge *Zelda* fan, and I think you end up embedding other games into your own game designs. With the 3D snowman and the snowball fight, and the circus game, well platformers were inherently 2D, but we were just on the cusp of 3D gaming. So *DKC 3* was still a 2D game, but starting to introduce depth into it was something we wanted to play with."

Of course, the third *Donkey Kong Country* title also had its own helpful jungle critters, most notably an elephant with a useful trunk and an inconvenient aversion to rodents. "We had multiple mechanics with the elephant,"

"WE HAD A RANGE OF AGE GOING ALL THE WAY UP TO CRANKY KONG, SO WE THOUGHT WE WOULD GO IN THE OTHER DIRECTION"
PAUL WEAVER

» [SNES] Although often annoying, *Donkey Kong Country 2*'s strong winds can blow you across wide gaps.

Paul grins. "We had the aspect of being able to suck objects towards you, and then throw them. Then you could suck up water and use that. The next iteration was where we had mice under spotlights, and the elephant was afraid of them and ran away. We had added that as a little bit of personality, but it then became a mechanic. So we combined all of the elements together, where you avoided the spotlights or knocked the mice off from a distance."

Yet more anthropomorphic characters followed, although non-player ones, in the form of a family of shopkeeper bears who facilitated the introduction of trading and hiring to the series. "We had to come up with their quirks, and I only had four lines of dialogue for each one!" Paul exclaims. "But they added a nice touch. You know, you had the Donkey Kong coins and the silver coins, so there was almost coin fatigue creeping in. So beating a boss and getting a random object, and then remembering that a bear on an earlier level had been talking about it. That was useful for bringing the game's elements together, and it was a fulfilling sub-quest to round out the story as well."

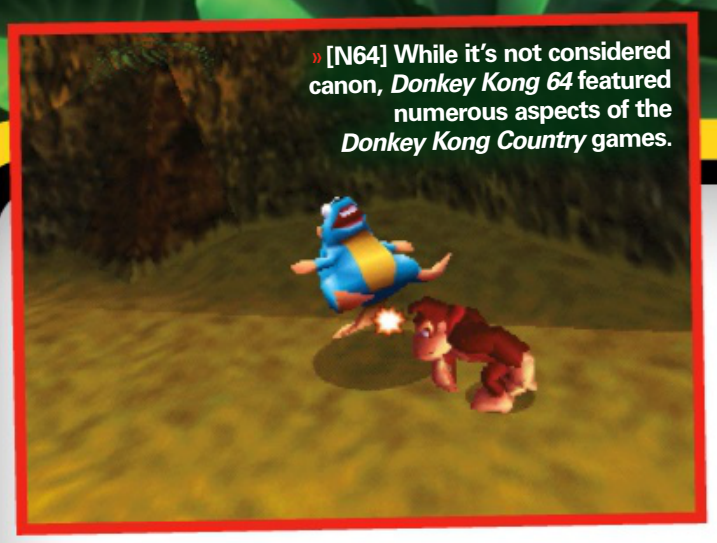
Although not released until after the N64's Japanese launch, *Donkey Kong Country 3* still sold remarkably well and concluded the trilogy in style. That wasn't the end of Rare's *DK* adventures, however, as it went on to create two additional games that took the popular primate and the cast of characters from the *DKC* series into the third dimension.

» [SNES] In a callback to *DKC*, Glimmer The Anglerfish lights the Kongs' way in *Donkey Kong Country 2*

Diddy Kong Racing was a highly entertaining kart racer that let players race in karts, planes and hovercrafts. While its multiplayer wasn't quite as slick and polished as *Mario Kart 64*, it bettered that game from a single-player perspective thanks to its incredible Adventure mode, which was not only brilliantly structured but featured entertaining boss battles where you had to out-race them.

Rare's final *DK* game on home consoles was *Donkey Kong 64*, which made its debut on the Nintendo 64 in 1999. Initially you simply played as DK, but as you explored the huge island that the game was set in you encountered additional members of his tribe, including Diddy Kong. Each new primate had distinct abilities that you needed to use extensively if you wanted to defeat King K Rool and his Kremling minions. Chunky Kong could lift rocks, Tiny Kong had the ability to shrink and enter tiny holes, Diddy Kong could fly thanks to a handy jetpack and Lanky Kong could float. While critically acclaimed

» [SNES] Kiddy Kong can bounce over water in *Donkey Kong Country 3* to avoid opponents beneath the surface.



» [N64] While it's not considered canon, *Donkey Kong 64* featured numerous aspects of the *Donkey Kong Country* games.

> "THE CLINGING SYSTEM WAS A BIG ADDITION. IT WAS ONE OF THE THINGS WE WANTED TO DO TO EXPAND MOVEMENT FROM JUST THE GROUND PLANE"
> KYNAN PEARSON

at the time, it drew some criticism for being quite the collect-a-thon, and for its overall length and occasionally wonky camera angles. That didn't put off gamers, however, and it proved to be another big seller for Rare, shifting over 2.4 million sales by 2004.

Despite these successes, however, the *Donkey Kong Country* series proper didn't continue until 2010, with Retro Studios rather than Rare at the helm. *Donkey Kong Country Returns* for the Wii reinstated DK and Diddy as the player characters, although you couldn't swap between them, as the game's senior designer Kynan Pearson notes. "We knew that the DK/Diddy switch was an important feature in Rare's original, but we wanted to take a 'combined character' route," Kynan considers. "When we had made that decision we were working closely with Risa-san and Tanabe-san at Nintendo Software Planning & Development – SPD. Basically, changing the health system and going with combining the two characters was a new system. But it also worked with the hit points, and allowed for an escalation of power, where DK and Diddy could do a prolonged, infinite roll when they were together."

Solo players could also make use of Diddy's jetpack to pull-off double-jumps – as whenever he was in-play in single-player mode he would cling to DK's back, and a second player playing the monkey had access to his peanut popgun. "We had seen everything that had been done with Diddy in every game series, and there were a few things that we felt like adding – like the jetpack and the popgun," Kynan reviews. "There were obviously benefits with the stalled descent you got from the jetpack, and then the popgun was there to give a second player something fun to do that would also be of benefit. There was also an aspect of wanting to allow a second player with no experience of the game to hop on DK's back and not worry about the difficult platforming."

Adding to the challenge of the platforming in the latest *DKC* title was a new and ingenious mechanic, which allowed DK and Diddy to climb vertical and overhead areas by grabbing handfuls of the grass growing on them, and then pulling themselves upwards or across. "The clinging system was a big addition," Kynan remembers. "It was one of the things we wanted to do to expand movement from just the ground plane, because it gave opportunities for wall and ceiling gameplay. I remember it was one of those things that we documented heavily and expanded on, just to build the screen with interaction no matter which direction you were headed. We wanted to give just as much to do on the top-half of the screen, with ceiling gameplay and where you were on walls, and clinging afforded that."

Another of the game's mechanisms stemmed from technical considerations rather than gameplay related ones, in that rather than stopping the Kongs at the screen edges if they strayed too far apart in two-player mode, they instead got teleported back to their partner. "If we had stopped the camera movement we would have created significantly more frustration in terms of making precision jumps that required momentum, and on some levels that supported faster play," Kynan assesses. "Players could have also prevented forward momentum and movement by just hanging back, and that would have created opportunities where you were fighting with your partner rather than working together."

One further differentiation between *Returns* and the original *Donkey Kong Country* came in the form of levels played at dusk, where everything was depicted in silhouette form. "It was really about working with silhouettes in terms of clarity of experience by separating foreground and background," Kynan explains. "The idea was that we could use parallax as a way to allow you to immediately differentiate things that were going to flow past from things you could interact with. This created a striking visual quality, and we could sometimes use that for puzzles. So for instance, we had statues that would line-up to become the silhouette of a banana on a pillar, where all of the layers of parallax came together."

Released to glowing reviews, first on the Wii then the 3DS three years later, the positive response to *Donkey Kong Country Returns* led to a sequel – subtitled *Tropical Freeze*. Its creative director Vince Joly recalls a desire to make its icy foes relatable. "Here was the high-level thinking behind the Snowmads," Vince begins. "After using the more abstract design of the Tikis in *Donkey Kong Country*

» [Wii] Although near-dark, the silhouette stages in *Donkey Kong Country Returns* present clear objectives.

» [Wii] Unlike *DKC*, DK has the ability to cling to grassy surfaces in *Donkey Kong Country Returns*.

» [Wii] DK can team up with Diddy and use his jetpack to double jump in *Donkey Kong Country Returns*.

» [Wii] Like earlier Kong titles, Diddy's weapon of choice in *Donkey Kong Country Returns* is a peanut popgun.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: COMPOSING DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

DAVID WISE ON CREATING SOUNDTRACKS FOR THE SERIES

» The musician on *DKC* and *DKC 2*, David Wise also composed the soundtrack for *DKC Tropical Freeze*.

Why did the *Donkey Kong Country* soundtracks tend to alternate between upbeat and atmospheric?

The music was driven by what we wanted the player to do, and if we wanted to panic them! So there was always a lot of 'psycho-acoustic' stuff going in, and that was why we chose Stickerbush Symphony for Bramble Blast. Because it was a really hard level, and having the juxtaposition of *smooth* music created a different feeling than if we had put really *hard* music in.

What sort of direction did Tim Stamper give you on the *DKC* games?

It was never Tim standing over your shoulder. He would take you away and explain exactly what he wanted, and you would come back with something that might work. Invariably there could then be several iterations of that. The first thing you brought him might not work, so you would go away until you found something that did.

How did the Kongs 'singing' at the start of *DKC* come about?

We used a vocal pad, and we got Mark Betteridge, who was head of coding – because he was great at monkey sounds! We could only have a small selection of those, but I wanted the Kongs to sing, so I took his sample and just *pitched* it, and played around with it. That was how we got the Kongs singing at the beginning.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:
COMPARING THE KONGS

HOW DONKEY KONG'S SPECIAL ABILITIES COMPARE TO HIS PRIMATE PARTNERS'

DONKEY KONG

In the SNES original, DK can dispatch foes by jumping on them, rolling into them, throwing barrels at them and slapping the ground in front of them! In *DKC Returns*, he can also climb grass-covered walls and ceilings, and in *Tropical Freeze* he can pull handles to activate mechanics.

DIDDY KONG

Like DK, Diddy can throw barrels at opponents or jump on them in *Donkey Kong Country* – although he can jump higher and is faster, and he has a cartwheel attack. His abilities are identical in *DKC 2*, but in *DKC Returns* and *Tropical Freeze* he has a peanut popgun and a barrel jetpack.

DIXIE KONG

In *DKC 2* and *3*, Dixie's most useful talent is her ability to spin her ponytail-like helicopter blades while jumping, which allows her to travel safely over great distances. In *Tropical Freeze*, she has a bubble-gum gun, and can use her ponytail as a propeller when she's under water.

KIDDY KONG

Dixie's co-star in *DKC 3*, Kiddy's weighty build makes him ideal for her to throw him through cracked ceilings into hidden areas! He can also smash down doors by rolling into them, and he can bounce along stretches of water by combining a roll with a jump just as he hits the surface.

CRANKY KONG

First playable in the *DKC* series in *Tropical Freeze*, the original Donkey Kong uses his cane as a pogo stick, which allows him to jump much higher than the other Kongs in the game and take out foes that they can't tackle. He can also stun opponents by firing sets of dentures at them!

» [Wii U] *Tropical Freeze*'s Snowmad opponents are Scandinavian or arctic in origin, with a little artistic licence.

» [Wii U] Cranky Kong can pull-off huge jumps in *Tropical Freeze* by using his cane as a pogo stick.

Returns, we felt that there was more that we could do to have the player relate to the Kongs' foes. We wanted a set of baddies that would thematically and physically match up well against DK as a large primate. So polar bears, sea lions and walruses all seemed like good mammalian match-ups – and that was the beginning of the story of these nomadic snow creatures invading DK's island."

In addition to its wintery opponents, *Tropical Freeze* was also given not one but three secondary player characters: Diddy, Dixie and for the first time Cranky Kong. "It was decided among leadership that we should expand on DK's universe, and that by re-introducing these nostalgic characters with new gameplay mechanics we could keep the *DKC* franchise fresh and exciting," Vince enthuses. "I believe the idea for Cranky's abilities came from brainstorming meetings that the designers had, where they thought about how they could use his cane in interesting ways to give him a new ability. A 'pogo stick' like action seemed to be a good fit, as it provided the player with a choice of which Kong they should use when, for example, faced with sections of spiked pits."

Tropical Freeze's titular hero DK also gained fun new abilities, which included picking-up

» [Wii U] DK can use fallen foes as a ranged weapon in *Tropical Freeze*, like Kiddy in *DKC 3*.

» [Wii U] In *Tropical Freeze*, DK can trigger interactive features by pulling handles out of the ground.

stunned foes and using them as projectiles – much like Kiddy had been able to do in *Donkey Kong Country 3*. "The more we could do to make the baddies feel like tangible living creatures the better, and being able to pick them up and throw them helped that feeling," Vince reasons. "Adding this mechanic immediately opened the door for more charming characters, along with the new and interesting gameplay opportunities of timing throws at targets. Because this action was designed to be done while in motion as well as while DK was stationary it really helped to maintain the flow of the player's progression."

"WE WANTED A SET OF BADDIES THAT WOULD THEMATICALLY AND PHYSICALLY MATCH UP WELL AGAINST DK AS A LARGE PRIMATE"
VINCE JOLY

Another of DK's freshly acquired talents involved pulling handles out of the ground and other flat surfaces, which would reveal pick-ups or aid his progress in less obvious ways such as producing platforms, uncovering paths or draining tanks of fruit juice! "It allowed for a further sense of exploration by seeking out these small triggers," Vince observes. "It also gave the player a new mechanic to learn that mixed in with the Kongs' other abilities. The less obvious implementations added some nice variety to the player's progression, but the satisfaction of this cause and effect had its limits. The Kongs' other actions like the Ground Pound and Barrel Cannon just tended to feel like more satisfying ways to unlock new platforms or areas."

One area where *Tropical Freeze* mirrored its predecessor rather than differentiating itself was with its choice of animal buddies, although other options were explored. "We were thinking that bringing back the familiarity that players experienced in *Donkey Kong Country Returns* would be a good way for us to further strengthen their love for these characters," Vince contemplates. "We felt this was the right choice over adding different buddies in their stead, and we believed the introduction of the other Kongs filled the need for expanding the character line-up and adding new player mechanics. However, we would have *loved* to have introduced some new animal buddies. Like Enguarde, for instance, who did come close to being added."

After reviewing well when it came out for the Wii U in 2014, an enhanced version of *Donkey Kong Country Tropical Freeze* arrived on the Switch in 2018, and this brought the series to a close – at least at the time of writing. On the 1994 SNES original that started the series off, Kevin Bayliss praises what was achieved on limited hardware, and the great feeling that you still get from playing the game. "It astounds me that it ended up looking so good with just a small amount of colours and fairly low resolution," Kevin beams. "I think it's still a great game to play, because it's packed with humour, and it's just so charming and atmospheric. It's something I'm really proud to have been involved in, and I can't believe that I was one of the people who got the whole thing moving with the original models I created. When I look back at it now, it's bananas!"

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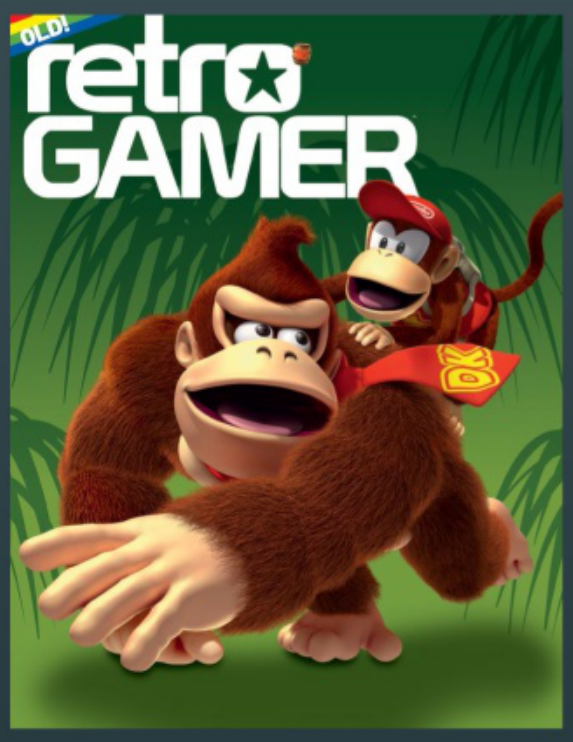		
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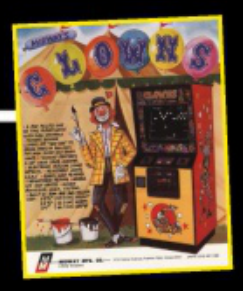
THE MAKING OF

CIRCUS

ROLL UP! ROLL UP! LET EXIDY'S RINGMASTER HOWELL IVY TAKE YOU DOWN CLOWN ALLEY TO THE EARLY DAYS OF THE ARCADES AND HIS BIG HIT SET IN THE BIG TOP

WORDS BY PAUL DRURY

» Howell Ivy, designer and programmer of *Circus*.



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** EXIDY

» **DEVELOPER:** EXIDY

» **RELEASED:** 1977

» **PLATFORM:** ARCADE

» **GENRE:** BOUNCE-'EM-UP

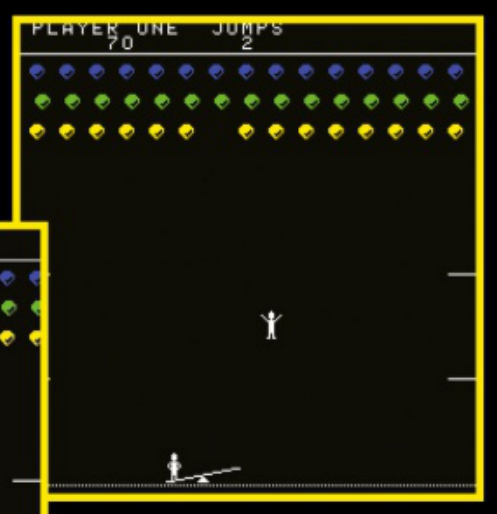
It might be 45 years ago, but Howell Ivy clearly remembers the evening of 4 July 1977. "I was working on *Circus* late into the night," he recalls, wistfully, "and I wandered outside and all the fireworks were going off. I remember thinking, 'It's Independence Day. Why am I working on a holiday?' But I had to get the game done and shipped. That is what you have to do when you own a company."

The company in question was Exidy, founded in 1973, and after some minor success with *Pong* variants such as *TV Pinball*, had crashed into the public imagination through its 1976 release, *Death Race*. The game required you to drive your car over pedestrians - sorry, 'gremlins' – and was dubbed the first 'videogame nasty' by a febrile media, which of course helped sales immensely. We wonder if the family friendly theme of *Circus* was chosen to distance Exidy from the controversy and show a more wholesome side to its output?

"No!" replies Howell emphatically, before bursting into laughter. "The idea came from me going back to the first game I ever did, *Clean Sweep*, when I worked for Ramtek. It has a similar approach of you trying to eliminate objects on the screen but we wanted to do something different, something appealing. Let's make something cute – a teeter-totter [a seesaw in English linguistics – Ed] and that simple idea of jumping on one side and making the other side go up. So what should you eliminate? How about balloons? Where might that happen? A circus! I start with the concept, then work towards a game title… it's a process."

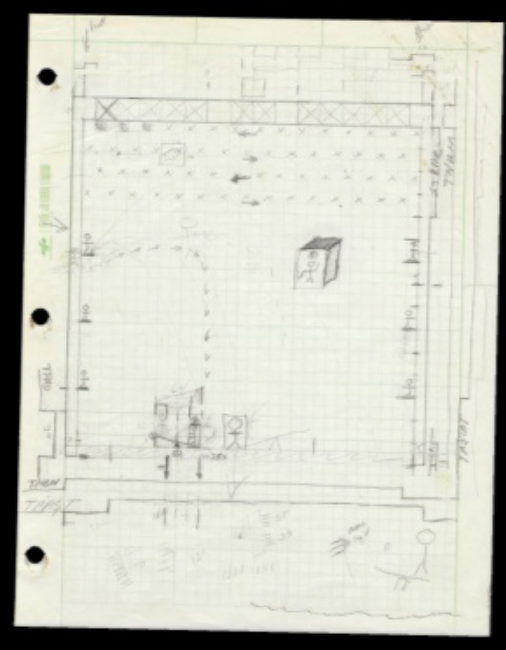
The idea for *Circus* might be simple, requiring you to bounce a pair of clowns high into the air, bursting three rows of balloons with their flailing limbs and avoiding a fatal impact with the ground, but the game was only the second Exidy title, after *Robot Bowl*, to solely use a microprocessor. Previously, games had been created in hardware using discrete integrated circuits, so being able to actually code the game in software was a huge step forward. "In hardware, you had to kind of develop the game in your own mind before putting the circuits down," explains Howell, "and to change it was very difficult. In software, you have so much more flexibility. You can add, how should I put it, more 'intelligence' to the game. It was much simpler for you to make the game easier or harder for the player, responding to his or her reactions and playing around with the difficulty."

Howell coded *Circus* on a 6502 processor, using a teletype machine connected to a mainframe located "some place in the world", he quips. He used the power of the new technology to add many sweet touches to the game, from the platforms at the side of the screen which add a little randomness to the clowns' entrances



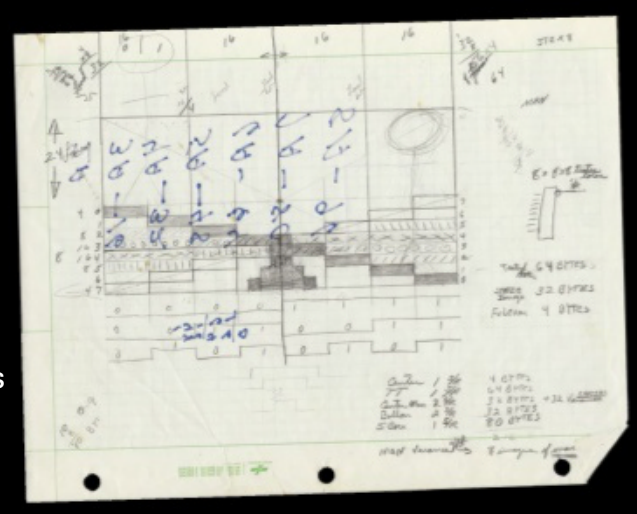
» [Arcade] Considering the limitations of the hardware, *Circus* manages to give its two protagonists some character, through their energetic limb-waggling.

» [Arcade] Colour was added to the balloons using cellophane back in the Seventies – MAME conveniently does it digitally.



» Howell's original pencil sketch on graph paper of the main *Circus* screen.

» Howell's original calculations on graph paper for the timing of the seesaw in *Circus*.



"WE WANTED TO DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT, SOMETHING APPEALING. LET'S MAKE SOMETHING CUTE!"

HOWELL IVY

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DEATH RACE
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1976

STAR FIRE
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1978

CHILLER (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1986

» [Arcade] The platforms at the side of the screen not only allow a new clown to appear with some warning but can redirect a plummeting clown, a little like the galleries in a real tennis court.

» [Arcade] The key to high scores in *Circus* is getting a clown to hit the seesaw at just the right point to propel his comrade high enough to burst the blue balloons.

and exits, to the 'segmentation' of the seesaw, meaning where a clown lands on the beam determines the height and direction of his hapless partner's upward trajectory.

The balloons are coloured and award the player different points for bursting them, though back in 1977, adding colour to a game was a very tactile process. "We actually put cellophane on the screen to give it those colours," laughs Howell.

***Circus* went out on field-test in nearby arcades, always a tense time for a developer.** "No matter how you feel about the game during development, in the confines of your own facility, you don't know how it's going to do until it gets out and the public plays it," says Howell. "We did think it might appeal to a female audience, which was always the Holy Grail. It wasn't violent, it was cute. Even the sound was cute! The game had a warm and fluffy feel to it that we thought women could relate to."

The game successfully attracted quarters from across the gaming demographic, bringing in not only much-needed revenue for the company but allowing it to license the game to a range of companies across the world. Exidy manufactured and supplied PCB boards to Sega, which renamed the game *Seesaw Jump*, Taito which released it as Acrobat and eight other companies, including Midway's version, *Clowns*, which adds an 'OOF' or 'POW' when one of the jokers faceplants the ground.

"I'd say *Circus*, of all the games we did, was the one that made the most profit," says Howell, proudly. "It was the game that let Exidy grow into a mature company. It was a good game, it was well-received and there were all the licensing agreements. We were producing 100 games a day in a 25,000 square foot building and I'd say we made about 6,000 [units] altogether. And every 4 July, I remember that night, working on *Circus*. I'm always going to have fond memories." ✱

THE LITTLE BIG TOP

CLOWN AROUND WITH THESE HOME VERSIONS

CIRCUS ATARI

ATARI 2600

Ignoring the square balloons, this is a good match for the hardware, not only in terms of the straightforward gameplay but because of the paddle controllers bundled with the console. The simultaneous two-player options are great.

CLOWNS

C64

A very early release for the Commodore 64 when games were in short supply. While it hardly showed off the capabilities of the new machine, it replicates the original well and the chunkier, slower-moving clowns make it considerably easier.

CLOWNS AND BALLOONS

ATARI 8-BIT

Datasoft swapped the seesaw for a trampoline and added a third clown to the troupe, who scales the ladders which border the screen before taking his leaps of faith. Also features a terrifying giant monkey with glowing eyes and a top hat.

CIRCUS LINUX!

PC, VARIOUS

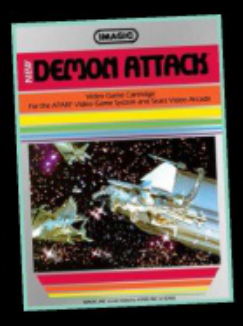
This relatively modern version, released in 2003 across a range of computers, consoles and handhelds, keeps the simple premise intact whilst adding some nicely drawn big top backgrounds and lots of colour and character.

THE MAKING OF DEMON ATTACK

THIS FAST-PACED VERTICAL SHOOTER WAS ONE OF THE BIGGEST HITS ON THE ATARI 2600, CEMENTING THE REPUTATION OF NEWLY FORMED PUBLISHER IMAGIC. HOWEVER, ITS GENESIS IS A TALE OF REVENGE

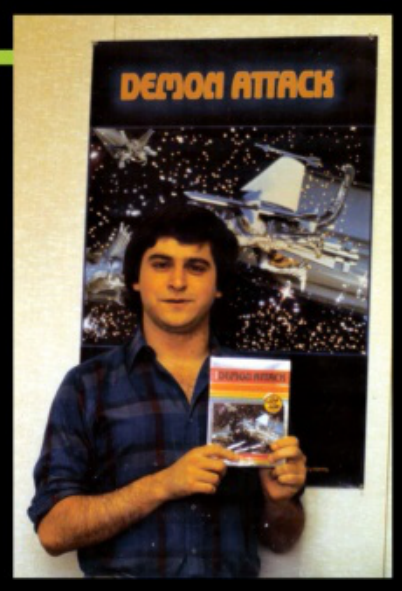
WORDS BY LEWIS PACKWOOD

» [Atari 2600] If you can take down a wave of demons without dying, you're rewarded with an extra life.



IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** IMAGIC
- **» DEVELOPER:** ROB FULOP
- **» RELEASED:** 1982
- **» PLATFORM:** ATARI 2600, VARIOUS
- **» GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP



» Rob Fulop worked on *Demon Attack* at Imagic after being disappointed with his treatment at Atari Inc.

Our story begins with a break-up. Rob Fulop had worked on a range of games at Atari in the late-Seventies, including a version of *Space Invaders* for Atari's 8-bit computers, but by 1981 he'd had enough. Programmers at the firm had long been at loggerheads with management over their meagre compensation – David Crane and several others had left to form Activision two years previously after Atari refused to pay them royalties for the games they had created, or even give them a credit on the box. For Rob, the straw that broke the camel's back was the insulting compensation he received for coding the multi-million-selling Atari 2600 version of *Missile Command*. "They gave me a turkey for Thanksgiving," he says. "That was my bonus."

Suitably outraged, Rob and a handful of others left to form the developer and publisher Imagic. "I wanted to make something that was going to be as good as possible, just so Atari would be really sorry that they treated me badly," says Rob. "I think a lot of people who create stuff are motivated by anger or pain, right? Love songs are all about, you know, a horrible person who left them and did them wrong. So much of the creative impulse comes from revenge or anger. I think I've done some of my best work when I was just really annoyed!"

"THEY GAVE ME A TURKEY FOR THANKSGIVING. THAT WAS MY BONUS"
ROB FULOP

Imagic was a game-developer's paradise, just like Atari in the early days. "I never had to produce even a description of what the game would be," says Rob. "They just assumed that we knew what we wanted to make. And when I got older, I realised what a luxury that was." With free rein to do whatever he pleased, Rob set about making a game in one of the most popular genres of the day: vertical shoot-'em-ups. "There was a game at the time called *Galaxian*, and *Galaxian* was *Space Invaders* where there were things that would peel off and come at you – and I decided that's what I would do," says Rob. "Then I realised I could just make 12 different kinds of monsters coloured seven different ways: it was 84 combinations of monsters."

It's these wonderfully colourful and beautifully animated monsters that really make *Demon Attack* stand out from its peers on the Atari 2600. "It was the first game that I ever did that used an artist," says Rob. "We wrote up a little simple graphic editor, so that an artist could actually make the demons. Believe it or not, at that time, that was an innovation: before then we had done all the graphics ourselves

» [Atari 2600] The manual for the Atari original says that the player is marooned on the icy planet of Krybor, and has to defeat legions of demons using their laser cannon.

ATTACK

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

COSMIC ARK
SYSTEM: ATARI 2600
YEAR: 1982

NIGHT TRAP (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: MEGA-CD
YEAR: 1992

DOGZ: YOUR COMPUTER PET
SYSTEM: PC, MACINTOSH
YEAR: 1995

with graph paper." Rob says that Michael Becker did the art, creating eight-phase animations of demons that were 16 pixels wide by 8 pixels high.

The way these demons move is one of the most memorable aspects of *Demon Attack*, as they bob, swoop and dive in a much more fluid and life-like way than the rigid enemies in *Space Invaders* or *Galaxian*. "The moving around was kind of a trick," says Rob. "It was trying to get it so you could almost hit them, but they could just swerve [at the last second]. That was a lot of tweaking, a lot of just messing with code. It was a trick that I learned [of] how to make something move not on the pixel, but on a fractional pixel. So it can move two squares every three frames, and that would make it move a little bit more accurately than just moving one pixel per ▶

DEMON SLAYER

HOW TO MASTER THE ATARI 2600 GAME

STAY CENTRED

Only three demons appear at a time, and only the bottom one fires at you. The firing demon will track your movements, so try to avoid getting trapped in the corners, instead move back and forth in the centre of the screen to avoid incoming fire.

BOTTOM FIRST

Concentrate your fire on the demon at the bottom. Each wave consists of eight demons, so after the bottom demon has been defeated six times, you'll be left with two non-firing demons that can be picked off at your leisure.

RAPID TAKEDOWN

If you pay attention to where the demons are spawning, you could take them out as soon as they appear. Watch for the lines emerging from the sides of the screen and aim for where they converge to take down the newly hatched demon.

TRICKY SPLIT

From wave five onwards, demons will split into two smaller demons when shot. If you shoot one of the pair, the other will start to dive bomb you. Either move to avoid it, or – even better – shoot it for a big point bonus.

QUICK PASS

The laser beams fired by the demons get longer and harder to avoid as you go on. Wait for the beams to pass completely through the bottom of the stage, then slide across under the firing demon and loose off a shot to eliminate it.

THE NEVER ENDING STORY

HOW DEMON ATTACK GOT TWEAKED TO MAKE IT ENDLESS

Rob found the later levels of *Demon Attack* impossible. "It's hard to make a game that plays better than you can play, right?" he chuckles. "There was no way I could test it beyond a certain point, because it was faster than I could do." He says that at the time, Imagic couldn't afford to bring in children for playtesting sessions and set them up behind a two-way mirror, as was often done at Atari. "I didn't really know how hard it needed to get," continues Rob, "and I [thought] no one's ever going to do 84 waves, you know? So after 12 times seven, I didn't want it to repeat, so then I just decided, 'OK, you won', and the game would just go blank. And I did that because I figured the demons were mad at you, and they would just say, 'I quit,' because I didn't have any memory left.

"I never thought I'd hear about it – until one week after I released it, I got called in [to see] Bill Grubb, and he said, 'Hey, somebody called and said a kid beat the game.' I said that's impossible. And then we started getting these calls every couple of days, and I said, 'Oh my god, I have to take this feature out, you know, because that's just not right.' So we had to remove that one line of code or two lines of code that just let the game [end]." Later runs of cartridges featured this tweak, which meant that the game would continue past 84 waves, but didn't get any harder.

"WE DID GET SUED BECAUSE OF THE INTELLIVISION VERSION, BUT IT WAS COMPLETE NONSENSE"
ROB FULOP

frame. Making it move one-and-a-half pixels per frame, making it move two pixels every three frames, or seven pixels every eight frames, that's what gave it a little bit more accuracy, so I could make it speed up and slow down … and it would look more like an organic thing. People hadn't done that in videogames – but then they all did it, you know, a week later."

Rob thinks that the long lifespan of the Atari 2600 meant that programmers had time to study it and really push its limits, coming up with graphical tricks like the above. "I had done seven products at that point on the system," he says. "Modern systems now … they do two or three product [cycles] on it, and then they're onto a new piece of hardware. So we got pretty good at it."

And *Demon Attack* was very good. If the game was meant to be a way for Rob to stick two fingers up at Atari, making Atari regret treating him so badly, then it succeeded magnificently. Players adored its frantic gameplay, which evolved over time as new enemies were introduced on each level, and it went on to become one of the best-selling games on the Atari 2600, reportedly shifting over 2 million units after its release in 1982. However, a problem emerged soon after the game went on sale, as players began to race through all 84 levels – at which point the game ended, setting it apart from the endlessly repeating shooters of the time. Rob tweaked the code for later cartridge runs to remove the hard stop (see The Never-Ending Story boxout).

"It won a bunch of awards and people liked it, and then it was copied to the other platforms," says Rob. *Demon Attack* ended up being released for a wide range of systems, including the Commodore 64, Intellivision, Magnavox Odyssey 2, IBM PC, TRS-80, TI-99/4A and VIC-20 – although Rob himself didn't work on any of these ports. "I did a three-page document that kind of described the guts of how the system worked, and how the algorithm generated new

» [Atari 2600] Each level introduces a new enemy, and they get faster and more lethal as the game progresses.

» [Atari 2600] On later levels, the enemies split into two – shoot one, and the other will dive bomb you.

» [C64] This demonic mothership doesn't appear in the original Atari 2600 game, and bears a striking resemblance to the mothership in Taito's *Phoenix*.

demons and stuff like that," says Rob. "[The ports] were all optimised to the particular hardware – there was no shared code.

"I'm embarrassed to say I didn't really play all the different versions," he continues, but adds that he did play the Intellivision port, which he wasn't a fan of. "I didn't like the way things moved on the Intellivision. The Intellivision had an operating system that you had to use. For instance, when I talk about fractional pixels – so you can move three pixels in two frames – they couldn't do that on the Intellivision. The designers of the Intellivision said, 'We're gonna move it, you tell me how many pixels it'll move per frame, and I'll move the objects for you.' Well, I don't want you to move the objects for me! Because then I can only say move it one or move it two – well I want to move it one-and-a-half. I want to move it three pixels every four frames, because that actually matters a lot, it'll be more precise. Well you couldn't do that on the Intellivision, so I hated it, I never wanted to touch the Intellivision."

» [C64] The backgrounds of the C64 version might look nice, but they mean it's easy to lose track of enemies and your own laser cannon.

» [Intellivision] Whereas the Atari 2600 version is set on the icy planet of Krybor, the Intellivision port seems to be set on the Moon, with Earth visible in the background.

The Intellivision port looks remarkably different, adding in a cratered foreground and the Earth in the background. Another change was that every few waves, the player would blast off into space to face a giant demonic mothership, with the aim being to blast through its shields while avoiding the waves of enemies it spawned. This part in particular made the game highly reminiscent of a vertical arcade shooter called *Phoenix*, released by Taito in 1980. This was enough to prompt Atari – which had licensed *Phoenix* for the Atari 2600 – to sue Imagic. "Well, Atari was suing whoever they could sue," shrugs Rob, although he thinks including the mothership in the Intellivision port of *Demon Attack* was a big mistake. "That, to me, was totally stupid. I mean, it's exactly the same game." The case ended up being settled out of court for an undisclosed sum.

"Those lawsuits were completely just designed to harass and bother the people that they sued, right?" says Rob. "These were never going to go to court, they were always settled out of court. So we did get sued because of the Intellivision version, but it was complete nonsense. I got sued when I left Atari too, just because they didn't like me leaving." It was a similar pattern to the formation of Activision a few years earlier, when Atari launched a barrage of legal proceedings against the newly formed publisher.

Considering its monumental success, it's perhaps surprising that there was never a follow-up game to *Demon Attack*. "They wanted to do a sequel," admits Rob. "And of course I was too stupid to realise the sequel makes a lot more money." Instead, Rob's next game for Imagic would be *Cosmic Ark*, where the aim was to guide the titular space vehicle to various planets in order to gather specimens from each one. He also developed the puzzle game *Cubicolor*, a sort of mix between a Rubik's Cube and a sliding tile puzzle. But Imagic didn't want to publish it, so Rob sold extremely limited numbers of the cartridge himself, making it quite the collector's item these days. He later went on to develop *Night Trap* for the unreleased Hasbro Control-Vision VHS console (although it was eventually ported to the Sega Mega-CD), and created the mega-hit *Petz* franchise in the Nineties.

But when he attends retro-game conferences, he's still bowled over by the love people have for *Demon Attack* some 40 years later. "All these people still like it and play it and ask all these questions about it," he says. A fitting legacy for a fantastic game.

Sensible Soccer

IT'S A FUNNY OLD GAME

» EUROCOM » 1993 » MASTER SYSTEM

As a Master System owner in 1993, I came to understand that while I could have some of the same big name games that my dad could get on the Mega Drive, there would inevitably be compromises to deal with when they came to my console. *Mortal Kombat* only had two backgrounds and you couldn't play as Kano, while *Streets Of Rage* had its multiplayer support omitted. Even miraculous efforts like the brilliant conversion of *Desert Strike* suffered a little because of the system's two-button control pad. Then there was *Sensible Soccer*, the Amiga classic ported by Eurocom. If I hadn't known any better, I could have been convinced that it was designed specifically for the 8-bit machine. The small sprites were a stylistic choice of the original, but allowed for the speed of the gameplay to come across intact, without any irritating flickering. Because the game was designed for the Amiga, another system with limited buttons, the control scheme just happened to be perfect for the pad already.

Of course, there were still some concessions to be made. The sound was naturally limited to a simple white-noise crowd roar, with none of the sampled sounds of the 16-bit versions. Instant replays were out too, likely because of the memory overhead needed for such a feature. These omissions didn't really feel particularly consequential though – *Sensible Soccer* felt much closer to its original version than many Master System conversions of the time. What's more, *Sensible Soccer* was of Premiership pedigree compared to the Sunday League efforts that were the Master System's previous football games, like the slow and awkward *World Soccer* or the hopelessly broken *Champions Of Europe*. The irony of it all is that those games had been designed for Sega's console from the ground up, but Sensible Software had created a game that fit Sega's venerable hardware better than any of them, without having ever intended to.

SO YOU WANT TO COLLECT...

AMSTRAD CPC 464 GAMES

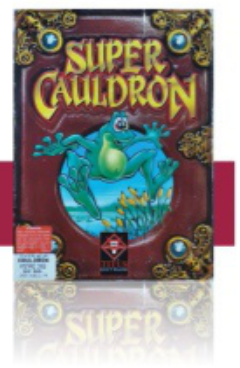
Although plagued by Spectrum ports, the CPC also offers tech-pushing exclusives and original gems that will appeal to all tastes. Here we focus on the cassette games you should consider as you start to build your collection

Words by David Crookes

» [Amstrad CPC] The Mode 0 graphics have been used to great effect!

BOILING HOT

SUPER CAULDRON



DEVELOPER:	ELMAR KRIEGER
RELEASE:	1993

■ By 1993, Austrian coder Elmar Krieger was already well-known within the CPC community for his demoscene exploits and development of *Zap't'Balls*, his superb *Pang* clone. He then impressed gamers further by coding *Super Cauldron* and *Prehistorik 2* for Titus – both now something of a holy grail for CPC game collectors.

Super Cauldron – a continuation of the *Cauldron* series – was arguably the most satisfying in terms of gameplay, but only by a smidgen. Aside from its beautiful presentation, this console-like game pushed the Amstrad's technical boundaries, boasting overscan graphics and fast, smooth, vertical and horizontal scrolling. It was the best home-computer version by a mile.

Sadly, the game was also one of the final commercial releases for the CPC – coming out at a time when lots of Amstrad users had moved on to the 16-bits. Since most gamers were forced to buy the game via mail order, far too few actually did, making it a rather expensive purchase today.

» [Amstrad CPC] It's just a shame the game wasn't around during the CPC's peak!

FUTURE CLASSICS

The modern CPC 464 games to collect

■ *Super Cauldron* and *Prehistorik 2* came late in the CPC's commercially viable life, at a time when games were increasingly being sold through magazine adverts and word of mouth among a fast-dwindling community of users. But development for the CPC has never stopped and, in recent years, there has been a real resurgence thanks to the annual CPCRetroDev competition, overall enthusiasm and a realisation the Amstrad 8-bits can achieve great things.

There are lots to consider if you're looking to supplement your collection with more recently released games. *Operation Alexandra* is a multi-award winner, for instance – a flick-screen arcade adventure by 4Mhz – which you may still be able to find for its original selling price of €19.95. There's also the shoot-'em-up *Dawn Of Kernel*, still on sale for €25. You could also snap up *Baba's Palace* although this one comes on the €10 CPCRetroDev 2017 cassette pack along with the other contenders that year.

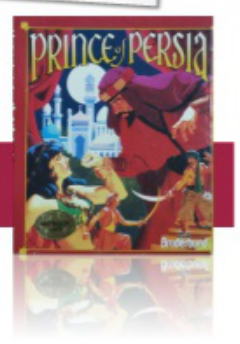
» [Amstrad CPC] The jarring music of the intro doesn't carry on into the game itself, thankfully!

» [Amstrad CPC] Once you've held aloft the magic sword, you're ready for action!

EXPECT TO PAY £25+ EUROPE

TIME TO BUY

PRINCE OF PERSIA



DEVELOPER: JORDAN MECHNER
RELEASE: 1990

■ Jordan Mechner's sword-swishing classic action adventure platformer excelled on the CPC and it had to be seen to be believed. Graphically superior to the other 8-bit versions (and close to that of the 16-bits), it remains hard not to be impressed by the rotoscoped animation and well-considered action-based puzzles involving loose floors, switches and spikes. You'd certainly whip out a copy if you were looking to showcase your CPC's abilities.

Or at least you would if you could locate one. The UK disk version is the most sought after (recently selling for £84 on eBay) but finding the game on cassette in its big box packaging isn't easy either. Look out for the sleek Broderbund-published French version which comes in a black box if you want something a little more 'exotic' or else just go for the striking red box published by Domark in the UK and Dro Soft in Spain.

» [Amstrad CPC] Buddy up with Sophia Hapgood in this arcade adventure.

» [Amstrad CPC] While it's not the greatest of games, *Fate Of Atlantis*' sheer rarity pushes its price up.

WHIP IT AWAY

INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS

EXPECT TO PAY £150+ EUROPE

DEVELOPER: LUCASARTS
RELEASE: 1993

■ Finding a UK version of *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis* is worthy of a future film plot – many collectors weren't even sure it had been released in the UK but then a copy found its way to eBay which confirmed that it had. Although it's a fundamentally flawed game, it still holds interest for being US Gold's last-ever CPC release and any confusion over its release can be simply put down to it arriving late in the 8-bit Amstrad's commercial life (it was reviewed in the French Amstrad *Cent Pour Cent* magazine but never in *Amstrad Action*). Will you have better luck finding the French version? Not necessarily, but you may enjoy trying.

MARVELLOUS MASCOT?

ROLAND ON THE ROPES

EXPECT TO PAY £3+ EUROPE

DEVELOPER: INDESCOMP
RELEASE: 1984

■ For a more focussed CPC collection, you could target the games published by Amsoft, perhaps starting with *Roland On The Ropes*, a game bundled with the CPC 464. Originally called *Fred*, it was renamed by Alan Sugar in honour of Amstrad's group technology consultant, Roland Perry, but there were eight *Roland* games in total, and most now sell for a few pounds. The hardest to find appears to be *Roland Goes Square Bashing* but, even then, your wallet won't be unduly troubled. For completist sake you may want to hunt down *Fred* as well as *La Pulga*, the Spanish version of *Bugaboo (The Flea)* which had become *Roland In The Caves*. The latter was recently being offered on eBay for £100 but that's hugely excessive in our opinion.

» [Amstrad CPC] *Roland On The Ropes* is fun and won't cost you a fortune.

SOFT FOCUS

Three more Amsoft games that you may want to collect

Harrier Attack

Durell Software allowed this game to be published for the CPC under the Amsoft label and it's widely considered to be a classic. Sure, it's a simple side-scrolling shoot-'em-up with jerky scrolling but you can pick it up for a few pounds (maybe just a quid at a local retro market).

EXPECT TO PAY £1+ EUROPE

Oh Mummy

Gem Software made quite a few games for the Amsoft label and *Oh Mummy* was among the best (we'd include *Sorcery+* which is the finest of all but it's disk-only). Bundled with the CPC 464 and riffing on *Pac-Man* and *Amidar*, it was actually inspired by a 1959 film.

EXPECT TO PAY £2+ EUROPE

The Lords Of Midnight

Mike Singleton's *The Lords Of Midnight* was also released under the Amsoft label on the CPC and it's a lovely game to get your mitts on. This RPG used a graphics technique referred to as 'landscaping' and it also came in a lovely box with a detailed 32-page manual.

EXPECT TO PAY £15+ EUROPE

Broaden your horizons

The CPC went down a storm in France and Spain and their games tended to not be straight Speccy ports, so enthusiastically explore these past markets.

Focus your attention

Maybe opt for complete Hit Squad, Kixx or Codemasters releases. Or watch out for the big box Amsoft games. A full collection of those would be cool!

Increase the memory

Some games offer extra features for 128K machines so consider a 64K RAM expansion. For 3-inch disk games, snap up a DDI-1 disk drive.

Join Facebook groups

Sure, you can scour eBay but there are some great Amstrad CPC marketplace groups on Facebook. Join fellow CPCers at CPCWiki for great advice too.

LOW COST, HIGH IMPACT

GRYZOR

EXPECT TO PAY £8+ EUROPE

DEVELOPER: OCEAN SOFTWARE
RELEASE: 1987

This superb blast-'em-up – a stunning conversion of Konami's *Contra* – lights up the CPC, making it a must-have for any collector. Released in 1987 and coded by the same team which developed the equally collectible *Renegade*, it included practically everything that made the coin-op great, while also looking amazing and having the best controls compared to the Speccy and C64 versions. No surprise, then, to see the game sold well so finding copies is relatively easy. Decide whether to go for the original, the Erbe Software Spanish release, The Hit Squad re-release or all three! The original included a demo of *Combat School* and if you can find one with the Konami club card intact, even better.

» [Amstrad CPC] *Gryzor* is a superb run-and-gun that also supports two-player turn-based action.

» [Amstrad CPC] There's loads of variety in this game including a dash through some corridors.

CREST OF A WAVE

Surf the web to find these Ocean Software essentials

Donkey Kong
Five years after Nintendo introduced Mario, Ocean Software grabbed the licence and produced a CPC version that was as faithful as it could be to the original. Save cash by finding the Spanish version distributed by Erbe Software.

EXPECT TO PAY £30+ EUROPE

The Addams Family
The Addams Family frequently appears on eBay but it's highly desirable because of its sheer quality. CPC 464 owners will need to opt for The Hit Squad 64K release. Even *Amstrad Action* only cover-mounted the 128K version.

EXPECT TO PAY £30+ EUROPE

Chase HQ
Ocean had a great Christmas in 1989 and *Chase HQ* was one of the reasons, racing to number one on the back of advance orders. The 464 version loses the speech but it still excels. Save cash and grab it on the *Wheels Of Fire* compilation.

EXPECT TO PAY £14+ EUROPE

PERFECT PLATFORMING

RICK DANGEROUS 2

EXPECT TO PAY £13+ EUROPE

DEVELOPER: CORE DESIGN
RELEASE: 1990

Rick Dangerous 2 was *Amstrad Action*'s highest-rated game (awarded 97%) and, given it sold so well, on cassette at least, it's easy enough to track down (the disk version is another matter). It was an absolute treat of a platformer thanks to its striking graphics and game design – one of those games that has to be included in a collection simply because you'll keep reaching for it when you have some hours to kill. Snap it up on tape in its original box form and you should have change from £20 but go for the re-release on the Kixx label and you may end up paying a little more. Watch out for copies of the Spanish version published by MCM Software because it includes a different title screen.

» [Amstrad CPC] You could choose to start any one of four levels – beat all to reach the fifth.

EGG-SHELLENT

DIZZY COLLECTION

EXPECT TO PAY £7+ EUROPE

DEVELOPER: VARIOUS
RELEASE: 1990

» [Amstrad CPC] *Magicland Dizzy* was created by Big Red, picking up the baton from the Oliver Twins.

Why buy a *Dizzy* compilation instead of each game individually? In this instance, it's because you'll bag yourself the first released copy of *Magicland Dizzy* (the budget release followed a few months later). You'll also get the debut *Dizzy* alongside *Treasure Island Dizzy*, *Fantasy World Dizzy* and *Fast Food* and it's actually quite cheap. If you'd still rather collect them individually, they'll be a lot more fun to track down, but they will cost you a little more. *Dizzy* can reach a tenner, *Treasure Island Dizzy* is normally a couple of quid, *Magicland Dizzy* rarely tops £3, *Fantasy World Dizzy* starts at £3 and *Fast Food* can hit £4. If you want every *Dizzy* game be aware that the later releases cost more. Spin-off *Spellbound Dizzy* recently sold for £66 while *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy* from 1992 has sold for £120 (ensure it comes with the instructions, plastic bag, poster and stickers).

MORE GAMES TO CONSIDER

GUILLEM DE BERGUEDA

DEVELOPER: ACE SOFTWARE
RELEASED: 1985
EXPECT TO PAY:
£85+ (EUROPE)

HAMMER-HEAD

DEVELOPER: POSTUM SOFT
RELEASED: 1992
EXPECT TO PAY:
£85+ (EUROPE)

DIGGER BARNES

DEVELOPER: K SPINNER
RELEASED: 1985
EXPECT TO PAY:
£59+ (EUROPE)

TARGET: RENEGADE

DEVELOPER: IMAGINE SOFTWARE
RELEASED: 1988
EXPECT TO PAY:
£5+ (EUROPE)

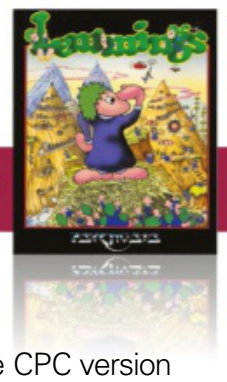
PURPLE SATURN DAY

DEVELOPER: ERE INFORMATIQUE
RELEASED: 1989
EXPECT TO PAY:
£15+ (EUROPE)

LET'S GO SPENDING

LEMMINGS

EXPECT TO PAY £60+ EUROPE



DEVELOPER: PSYGNOSIS
RELEASE: 1992

» [Amstrad CPC] Freedom for the Lemmings! Level codes were provided after each successful rescue.

■ It was surprising to see *Lemmings* released on the 8-bits in 1992. But, although the CPC version offered *just* 60 levels (100 less than on the 16-bits), the game still oozed character and charm. Moving around with a joystick certainly didn't detract from the fun and losing the music on the 64K version proved to be only a minor irritation. As such, the game deserves to be on a CPC collector's shelf today, even if finding the cassette version isn't easy (at £16.99, it was a pricey buy back in the day and when it does make a rare appearance, it definitely hasn't become cheaper). The tape is notable for the bug on the end message and the problems with password entering that aren't present on the disk. And if you're struggling, snap up the playable demo on the July 1992 *Amstrad Action* covertape for a couple of quid.

RUN-AND-FUN

TURRICAN II: THE FINAL FIGHT

EXPECT TO PAY £20+ EUROPE

DEVELOPER: RAINBOW ARTS
RELEASE: 1991

■ There is no denying that this game is huge. Not only is the main character a large sprite, it contains a staggering 1,500 screens and the game itself extends to more than 4,000 kilobytes of code compressed to 715K. Spread over 11 levels and using converted graphics from the Atari ST version, it's one of those games that needs to be coveted for its technical prowess. Yet it's also an amazing game with none of that effort having gone to waste. So why is the original standalone version so hard to find? One of the problems is that the game was quickly bundled onto the *MAX* (*Maximum Action Xtra*) compilation with *Night Shift*, *St Dragon* and *SWIV* and it proved to be an attractive package. The Kixx re-release is far cheaper, starting at £4.

GOOGLE TRANSLATE

LA ABADÍA DEL CRIMEN

EXPECT TO PAY £110+ EUROPE

DEVELOPER: OPERA SOFT
RELEASE: 1987

■ The Amstrad CPC was big in Europe so it's worth exploring the games released in these markets to expand your collection. Some games were disk-only (Loriciels' *Alphakhor*, Ubisoft's *BAT* and the rare adventures by French publisher Lankhor), but many also arrived on tape, among them *La Abadía Del Crimen* (*The Abbey Of Crime*), written by Paco Menéndez, who sadly died in 1999 aged 34. Considered one of the best 8-bit games ever made, the 464 version has fewer rooms and a smaller play area than the 6128 edition but it doesn't diminish the experience (yes, it's in Spanish). Ideally, look out for the copies marked with the Mister Chip logo rather than the MCM Software reissues.

» [Amstrad CPC] An English version was made available to download in 2017.

GOING CONTINENTAL

Here are two more European releases for your collection

Get Dexter

Released in 1986, this French graphic adventure was a CPC exclusive for a spell and it's still considered to be one of the Amstrad's finest games. Featuring 50 colourful isometric rooms, it made use of the multi-mode technique that mixed the Mode 0 and Mode 1 resolutions.

Zombi

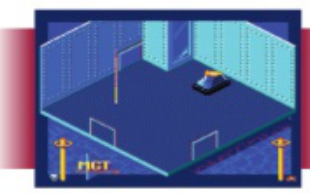
Ubisoft's *Zombi* was its first game to be developed and published and it debuted on Amstrad's CPC. An early example of the action adventure genre, it kick-started the longest-running zombie videogame series while paying tribute to George A Romero's *Dawn Of The Dead*.

CASTLE MASTER

DEVELOPER: INCENTIVE SOFTWARE
RELEASED: 1990
EXPECT TO PAY:
£150 (EUROPE)

INGRID'S BACK

DEVELOPER: LEVEL 9
RELEASED: 1988
EXPECT TO PAY:
£300+ (EUROPE)

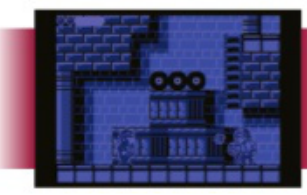


MGT

DEVELOPER: DOMARK
RELEASED: 1986
EXPECT TO PAY:
£15+ (EUROPE)

TITUS THE FOX

DEVELOPER: TITUS FRANCE
RELEASED: 1991
EXPECT TO PAY:
£30+ (EUROPE)



BLUES BROTHERS

DEVELOPER: TITUS FRANCE
RELEASED: 1992
EXPECT TO PAY:
£40+ (EUROPE)

Many thanks to Jaime González Soriano, Nicholas Campbell, Xyphoe and Themistocles Papassilekas for their invaluable help.

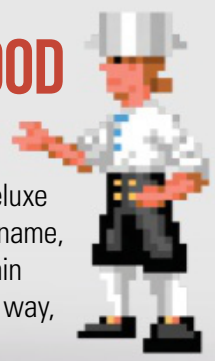
retro GAMER's FAVOURITE...

WEIRD CHARACTER NAMES

In the outlandish worlds that videogames present us with, sometimes it's the mundane oddities that really stand out. Battling mutants? No problem. A man called Dogs? We just can't buy it. So here are ten characters whose parents probably got some funny looks at the registry office

GUYBRUSH THREEPWOOD

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND



■ Back when he was being made, Guybrush Threepwood was just Guy – it was only a Deluxe Paint file name that gave him his proper forename, while Threepwood came from a contest within LucasArts. We're glad things turned out that way, as the name fits the character to a tee.

WAKLE SKADE

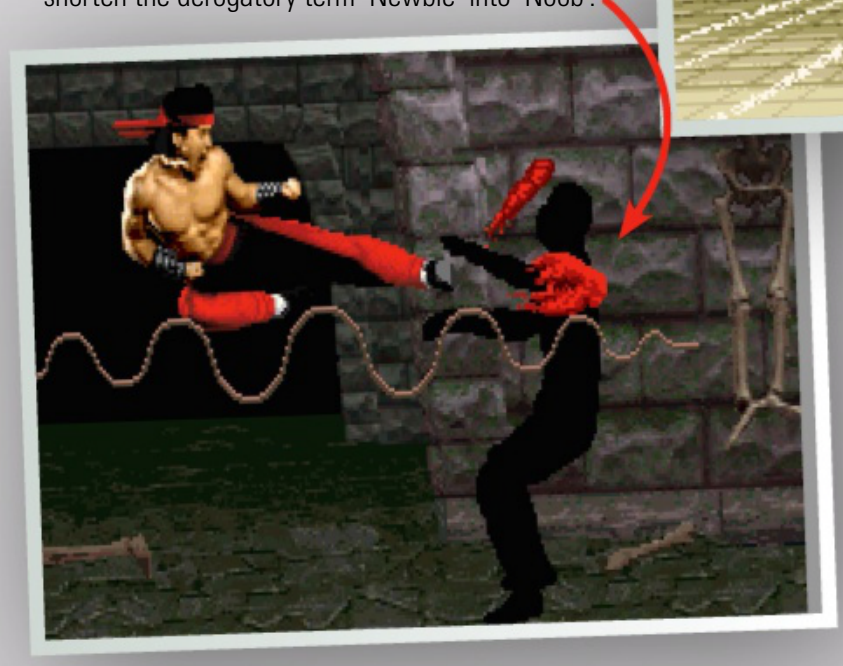
GUNGAGE

■ For two-and-a-half decades scholars have undertaken intensive research, yet none of their efforts have borne fruit. They do not know what language Wakle Skade is supposed to come from, nor what the name might possibly represent. Only one consensus has emerged – it is a totally ridiculous name.

NOOB SAIBOT

MORTAL KOMBAT II

■ We know how this name came to be, as it's the reversed surnames of *Mortal Kombat* creators Ed Boon and John Tobias. This one was odd but not particularly funny, until the internet decided to shorten the derogatory term 'Newbie' into 'Noob'.



GEESE HOWARD

FATAL FURY

■ The combination of a bizarre first name and regular surname is amusing, but what makes us chuckle is the fact that like actual geese, the final boss of *Fatal Fury* enjoys nothing more than causing trouble on purpose. He probably wishes he had wings too, given his ultimate fate.

DOGS BOWER

BLUE STINGER

■ Like Geese Howard, Dogs Bower is named after animals – specifically animals in plural form, for reasons we will never understand. In all fairness, his voice makes him sound like a man named Dogs and he does follow Eliot everywhere like an enthusiastic puppy, so maybe it's more sensible than we thought.

BIG LANDMAN

BURNING RANGERS

■ Sonic Team's firefighting game has some dodgy names all round, but Chris Partn is just a typo off of normality and Lead Phoenix makes a lot more sense when you know it's pronounced 'Reed'. Apparently, the developers just ran out of imagination for the team's largest member.

CHERRY COCKER

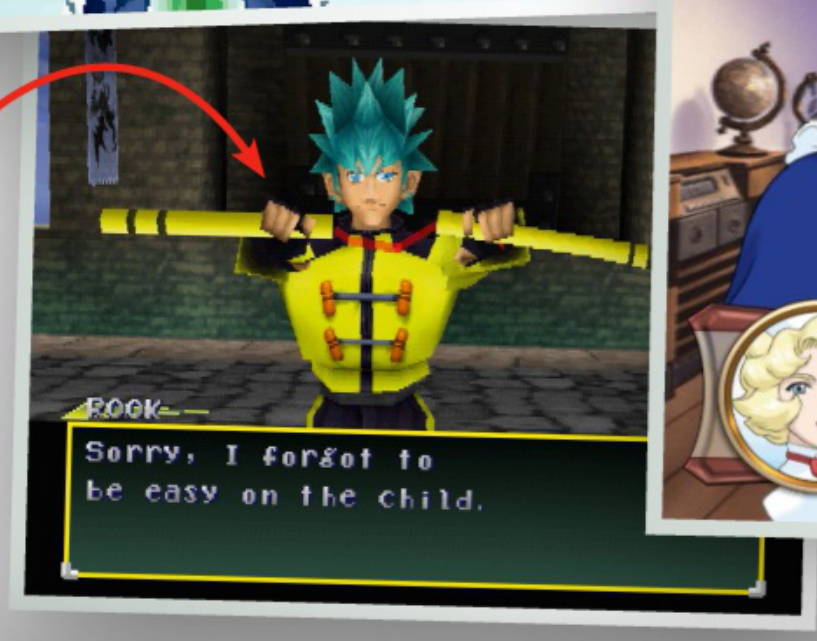
SAKURA WARS: SO LONG, MY LOVE

■ Pity poor Cherry – in Japan, she's got the even more ridiculous name of Plum Spaniel. The localisation staff tried to be clever, drawing on cherry plums and cocker spaniels to create an admittedly plausible name, albeit one that would be given by only the cruellest parents.

ROOK CASTLE

TOSHINDEN 4

■ This guy obviously loves chess, right? Maybe he'll talk in chess metaphors, or perhaps pull out a giant pawn to beat his opponents over the head with? It's an unusual theme, but we'll take it. Wait, what's that you say? He's just a goof with green hair and nunchucks? How disappointing.



BOBSON DUGNUTT

FIGHTING BASEBALL

■ This Japanese version of EA's *MLBPA Baseball* needed to ditch players with real names, so it's full of amazing fake players – we particularly like Onson Sweemey, Willie Dustice, Dwigt Rortugal and Sleve McDichael. But the internet chose a favourite, and his name is Bobson Dugnutt.

HOT COLDMAN

METAL GEAR SOLID: PEACE WALKER

■ Sure, he sounds more like an indecisive *Mega Man* boss than a CIA operative, but that's not our problem. Snake has rugged good looks and a butt that won't quit, Raiden's got his pretty boy charm, and this is the guy they call Hot? We're reassessing claims of Kojima's genius.

THE MAKING OF

MEGA lo MANIA

A COSMIC BATTLE FOR GLOBAL DOMINATION? SOUNDS SERIOUS. BUT WITH SENSIBLE SOFTWARE AT THE REINS, MEGA LO MANIA WAS ALWAYS GOING TO BE WORLDS OF FUN ABOVE ALL ELSE. JON HARE AND STOO CAMBRIDGE TOLD US ABOUT THEIR FIRST DEDICATED 16-BIT GAME

WORDS BY GRAHAM PEMBREY

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** IMAGE WORKS
- **DEVELOPER:** SENSIBLE SOFTWARE
- **RELASED:** 1991
- **PLATFORM:** AMIGA, VARIOUS
- **GENRE:** STRATEGY

From grunting cavemen to space-age UFO pilots, *Mega lo Mania* granted us the power to play god with an evolving civilisation while battling rival deities. This was at a time when 'god games' and 'real-time strategy' were still years away from becoming part of the gaming lexicon. It was hot on the heels of Bullfrog's *Populous*, which had broken broadly similar ground two years before. Between that and both *Dune II* and *Civilization* launching in the same year it was released, you could say *Mega lo Mania* was part of a wave of genre-defining strategy classics. It also fully embodied the tongue-in-cheek Sensible Software ethos with plenty of comic touches, from sassy voiceovers recorded by professional actors to island levels with gloriously irreverent names such as Hernia and Pyjama. *Mega lo Mania* was also the first game Sensible Software designed specifically for 16-bit machines, as well as its first to feature the iconic 'little men' sprites that would later reach much wider audiences in *Sensible Soccer* and *Cannon Fodder*.

Deciding to create a strategic god game might have been seen as quite a wildcard for Sensible Software to have played at that time. It came after it had built a solid reputation for shoot-'em-ups such as *Parallax* and *Wizball*, and sports games including *MicroProse Soccer* and *International 3D Tennis*. So what were the team thinking and where did the concept of *Mega lo Mania* originate from? It turns out the whole thing started, as many important things historically do, in outer space.

"The original version of the game was a kind of space race," Sensible Software cofounder and game designer Jon Hare told us. "You started off with a spaceship of a certain specification. You'd fly around and land on different planets, which would be split into 16-sector maps. And you could mine these planets for different minerals, then design different weapons and equipment on your spaceship. At the same time as mining and designing, you were also in control of flying the spaceship around trying to avoid bullets. Now in reality, that would have been a very ambitious game to complete and one that was hard to play because of everything you would need to manage simultaneously. So we decided about nine months to a year into the game's development to change course,

> "THE ORIGINAL VERSION OF THE GAME WAS A KIND OF SPACE RACE"
> JON HARE

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

WIZKID
SYSTEM: AMIGA, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1992

CANNON FODDER (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: AMIGA, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1993

SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER
SYSTEM: AMIGA, PC
YEAR: 1994

» Jon Hare is CEO of Tower Studios, a professor of game design, and former Sensible Software cofounder, game designer and artist.

HOW TO BE A MEGA LO MANIAC

BECOME THE ULTIMATE GOD WITH THESE HANDY TIPS

BUILD THE BASICS

■ Sticks and stones may win you thrones. Viking-style lightning raids with these easily designed basic weapons can catch your rivals off guard early in the game. As you progress through the islands, you'll need better tech.

MINE FOR GLORY

■ To build weapons, you'll need to acquire elements. Some are 'Gatherables' which means your men will collect them automatically. Others need men assigned as miners. Try finding areas with open mines, which look like moon craters, and build deep pit mines when your tech level allows.

ADVANCE AND EVOLVE

■ Building better gear will help you evolve a tech level. From Neanderthals to the Ancient Greeks, right through to Victorian and nuclear ages, each society is stronger and more efficient. Progressing faster than your enemies is often key to victory.

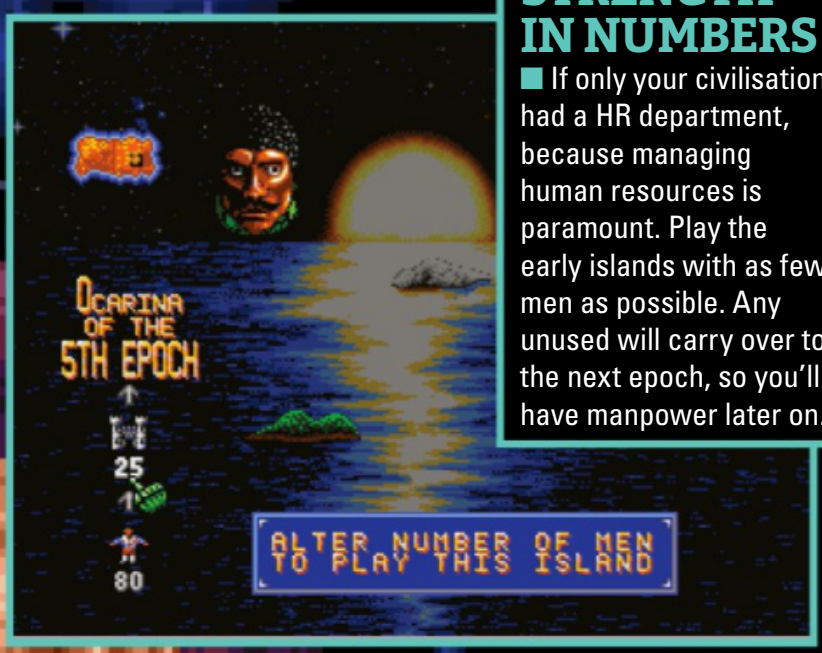
FORM ALLIANCES

■ Get political by partnering with your fellow immortals. Clicking on their icon will request an alliance. If they agree, they will leave you in peace and concentrate on other enemies. It's a fickle arrangement, easily broken, but it can buy you precious time.

» Stuart 'Stoo' Cambridge is an artist, game designer, writer and former Sensible Software team member.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

■ If only your civilisation had a HR department, because managing human resources is paramount. Play the early islands with as few men as possible. Any unused will carry over to the next epoch, so you'll have manpower later on.



» [Amiga] Building just a few planes can help you win a sector. But watch out for machine guns defending those enemy turrets.

» [Amiga] It's 1980 AD. You're flying a UFO over a space island called Zappa. Trippy.

» [Amiga] Once your civilisation reaches the Victorian period, you can build factories to ramp up production.

drop the spaceship flying bit and focus more on resource management."

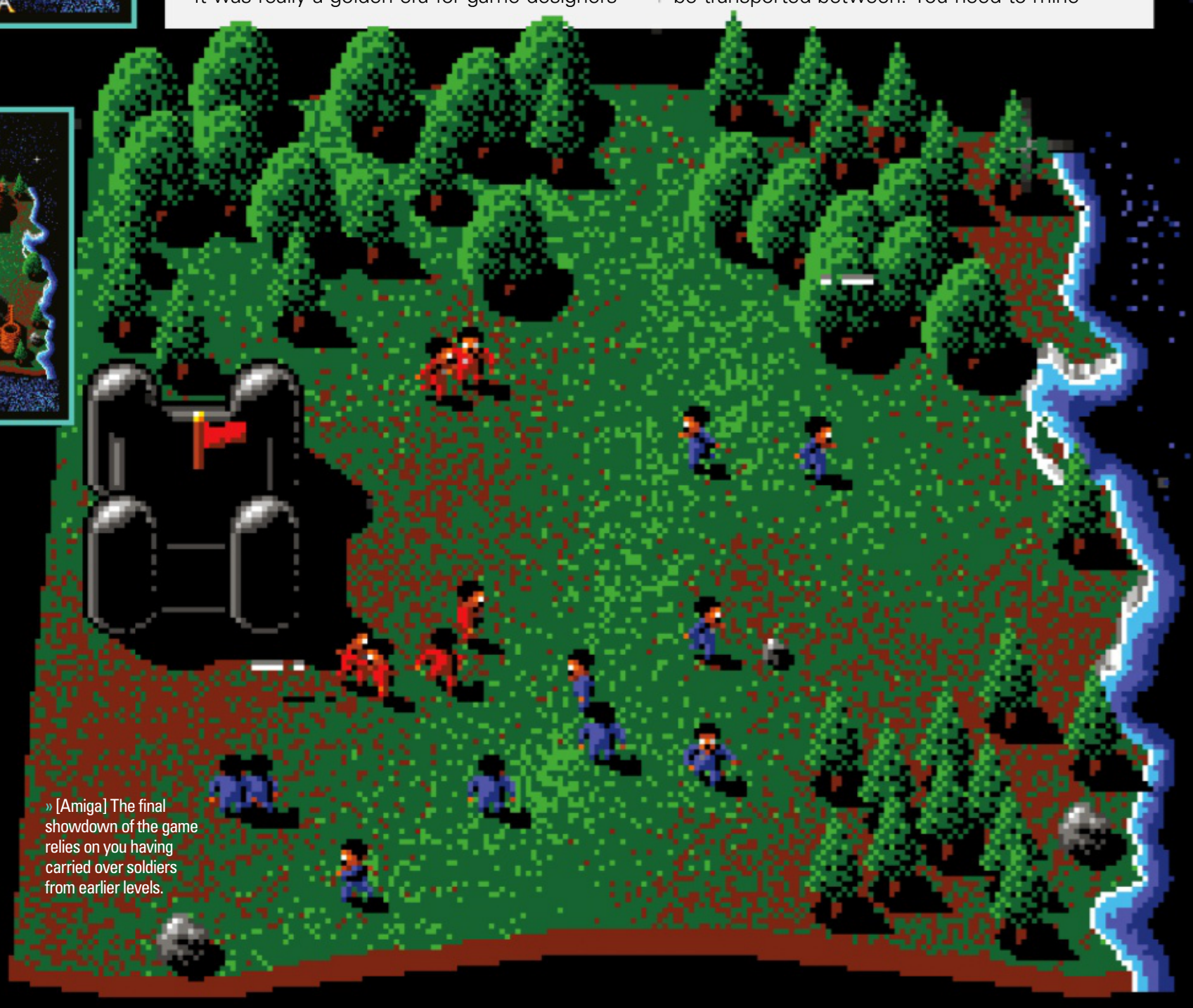
After seeing screenshots of *Populous* and *Powermonger* that showed cavemen, Jon had another revelation. "I decided to change the timeline of the technological race from starting in 10,000 AD to starting in 10,000 BC. That meant the game would take players from cavemen to biblical soldiers and Roman soldiers, up through the Elizabethan, Victorian, First and Second World War eras, to the modern day and into the future. At which point you would see spaceships, so they did make it into the game after all."

Jon recalls that while it was the very first Sensible Software strategy game, both publishers and gamers received the idea well. "Sensible Software made a variety of types of games and we were pretty much trusted with whatever we did, which was great for us because it's who we were. I remember going to see Virgin with the very early version of *Mega lo Mania* based around spaceships. It did get a bit of resistance at that meeting, a bit of, 'This looks too difficult to play and make,' which was correct, because it did turn out to be too much to create in that form. Later on, Image Works were very welcoming with the concept. It was really a golden era for game designers with the freedom we were given. Today we're in a relatively conservative era for new ideas because monetisation constricts the kinds of things you can do and dominates the landscape of design. But in those days, you could do what the hell you wanted."

Creating a game on a bigger scale also felt natural to Jon, now that the technology available to create games was catching up with his creative ambition.

"I'd designed at least one other larger game before, a big Ultima-style adventure game that never saw the light of day three years earlier. I'd wanted to design big games before the machines were able to deal with them, and *Mega lo Mania* working solely for a 16-bit machine gave me more freedom."

Mega lo Mania starts with a choice between one of four colourful characters. Beginning the first epoch – each epoch being a cluster of three islands that you can tackle in any order – you have 100 men at your disposal. Part of the strategy is choosing how many men to play on each island. Once you've made some choices, the proper game begins. It takes place on a series of square maps that armies can be transported between. You need to mine



» [Amiga] The final showdown of the game relies on you having carried over soldiers from earlier levels.

» [Amiga] Incoming! Nuclear warheads can be launched by you or your enemies to devastating effect.

» [Amiga] Element names include Maamite, Tedium and Moron, the latter being represented by a clown face.

elements, then build weapons, shields and buildings – all while keeping in mind that your enemy will be doing the same. Picking your moment, you can lay siege or try to take over another sector of land. Success comes from dominating the map and destroying your rivals.

Underpinning this gameplay were some mechanics that were highly innovative for the time. "We ended up being the first game ever to have a technology tree in it, where you design weapons and are then able to design improved technology on the back of your first design. And we were nearly the first game to have mining in it. There's a Japanese game called *Herzog Zwei* that included mining of minerals, which came out about a year before our game, but we'd certainly never heard of it before, so I guess ours was the second game to have mining. To my memory, we didn't come from the background of playing any resource-management games at all. It was just an idea that kind of escalated."

Was it a complicated process to work those kinds of mechanics into the game? "I suppose it was quite complicated to fine-tune and get right," Jon says. "I don't think we did get it all completely right – we made the final island too easy, for example. Balancing a game like that is hard. But mostly, putting it all together was a lot of fun. It was, 'Right we're going to put these elements in these squares, and let's see what we can put in this next one.' It was a bit of careful planning. I like to carefully plan things as much as possible. Because we approached it that way, it wasn't too difficult to execute the game. But it was in development for about a year -and-a-half, so it went through a lot of changes."

One of those changes involved the introduction of the 'little men' sprites whose legacy would spread beyond the game. "Because we had ditched the spaceships from the game, we decided to add men as the main thing that could be upgraded. As I was still the lead, and only, artist at Sensible Software at the time it was up to me to design these little men and then dress them up in different little uniforms throughout history. We got them beaming in and out of sectors, as having them walk in would have been too hard. After using them in *Mega lo Mania*, I dressed them up in football kits. I thought they looked kind of cute and so they ended up featuring in *Sensible Soccer* and again a year later in *Cannon Fodder*, for which Stoo did all the graphics. *Mega lo Mania* also featured the first Sensible Software graphics not done by me, as the intro sequence was created by Jo Walker."

Jon credits Chris Chapman, who programmed *Mega lo Mania* as his first

"WE LOST £75,000, WHICH AT THE TIME WAS 75% OF OUR TURNOVER FOR THAT YEAR"
JON HARE

CONVERSION CAPERS

WHAT'S THE BEST WESTERN CONVERSION?

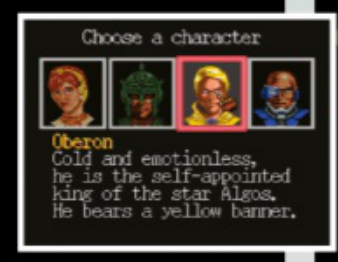
AMIGA

The original Amiga version of the game is hard to beat. Using the classic Amiga tank mouse to control your army and resources is deeply satisfying, and it makes navigating the menus a breeze. Amiga magazines heaped praise on the game.

MEGA DRIVE

Jon says this is his favourite conversion. Designed by Stoo Cambridge and Jools Jameson with great care, it would make GamesRadar's 2017 list of 'Top 50 Mega Drive Games Of All Time'. It's also the version playable on Blaze Entertainment's Evercade.

SNES



For the SNES port, character illustrations were redrawn to fit better with the Nintendo look, and more upbeat music was introduced. It loses some of the character of the original but plays fine once you get into the controls and menus.

ATARI ST

With fewer colours and lower-quality sound, there's a slight loss of sharpness in the Atari ST version, but otherwise little noticeable difference from the Amiga game. Atari magazines were all too happy to recommend the game to readers.

PC

"The PC game was OK, but the speed of play changed," Jon remembers. The Ubisoft conversion had some rough edges, which left *Computer Gaming World* to complain of "a lack of quality control somewhere in the development process".

A SECOND COMING?

JON DOESN'T WRITE OFF A MEGA LO MANIA REMAKE

Jon is currently working hard on PC and console versions of his hit mobile game *Sociable Soccer*. But he tells us recreating *Mega lo Mania* is something he would love to do if he had more time.

"From a personal perspective, of all the Sensible games, *Mega lo Mania* is the one I would most like to do a remake of for modern machines," he says. "Because it's not been touched since we did it. It would have been great to get the game online. That's what I would like to see, people playing it together in real time."

Back in 1992, a planned sequel was cancelled after a short while in production. "David 'Ubik' Korn was working on *Mega lo Mania 2*, which was going to have 3D textured landscapes" Jon confirms. "But it got cancelled because Mirrorsoft went down." Stoo also remembers the game being in development at this difficult time. "It was looking quite promising. *Cannon Fodder* was seeking a publisher too, as was *Sensible Soccer* I believe. With two other games seeking a deal, it didn't make it."

Jon is keeping his mind open about the future. "*Sociable Soccer* is my main focus. But if there's an opportunity to do a *Mega lo Mania* remake online, I might do that one day."

» [Amiga] Slow down or speed up the passage of time with the click of a button.

» [Mega Drive] The giant catapults those yellow soldiers are wielding are devastating for destroying buildings.

» [SNES] Wait a while on the SNES intro screen and you'll be treated to this intense demo battle.

game for Sensible Software, for how smoothly the game ended up running. He also pays tribute to the sound designer Richard Joseph, who created the brooding, tribal music that runs throughout the game, and also introduced over 50 phrases of sampled speech into the mix. These phrases include everything from "we've been nuked" to "the design is ready" and even "ergonomically terrific" when you create a weapon using the ideal combination of elements. "Richard was a bit of a genius with this stuff," says Jon. "If you look at the amount of speech in *Mega lo Mania*, at a time when games didn't usually have much speech, that was Richard. He had his contacts who came and did the voices. I would come up with characters and silly phrases to say. Richard and his innovation on the sound side, and his music themes added an awful lot to the game."

Mega lo Mania was released to rave reviews. But the road was about to get bumpy for Sensible. "What really hurt *Mega lo Mania* was the demise of the Mirror Group including Mirrorsoft, the parent company of Image Works," Jon remembers. "The timing of this was two months after *Mega lo Mania* was released and it was number one in the charts. Then the publisher basically ran out of money and the whole group of companies collapsed. We never saw a penny of those royalties. We lost £75,000, which at the time was 75% of our turnover for that year. To survive that was quite lucky, but unfortunately it meant *Mega lo Mania* never got the growing reputation it would have gathered if more copies had been selling towards the end of 1991 and 1992."

Despite Image Works going under, the critical success of *Mega lo Mania* meant that other major publishers such as Virgin and Ubisoft were interested in picking it up and creating conversions for all the major platforms of the era. Porting the games to consoles would particularly mean a lot of work, given that it had been designed to be played with a mouse, and came with a user interface that responded accordingly.

One member of the team working on a conversion was Stuart 'Stoo' Cambridge. Stoo was a new recruit to Sensible Software at the time, but he would go on to play a pivotal role in the studio's later games. He worked with Julian 'Jools' Jameson on the most critically acclaimed of all the *Mega lo Mania* conversions, which was for Sega's Mega Drive. In the United States, this conversion was released under the title *Tyrants: Fight Through Time*.

> "IF YOU READ GAMING HISTORY ARTICLES ABOUT GOD GAMES, I DON'T THINK MEGA LO MANIA GETS ENOUGH CREDIT, PARTICULARLY FROM AMERICAN SOURCES"
> **JON HARE**

"Ah *Mega lo Mania*, what can I say. It was my first-ever console project," Stoo recalls fondly. "Being an early adopter of consoles as a gamer, it was a format that I was incredibly excited about. Back then, any technical information about these machines was strictly concealed behind non-disclosure agreements, so being privy to the Mega Drive programming manual was incredible.

"I worked with Jools on the conversion. He had already worked on the 8-bit NES, so he was familiar with the way console games worked. Along with my insatiable appetite to get the graphics looking as close to the original as possible, it was a winning combination."

Stoo remembers the biggest challenge being memory limitations. "The Amiga had lots of memory in comparison to the Mega Drive and it used a totally different method to create displays and sprites," he says. "The intro graphics were originally drawn in 32-colour mode. I had to split the graphics into two playfields each taking 16 colours. When combined these would create a 30-colour display. However, the size of the original introduction graphics were too large, so every screen had to be redrawn to a smaller scale. In keeping with the original look, I also retained the stippling style [an art technique of using repeated small dots] to keep it true to source."

After working through the intro graphics and backgrounds, Stoo says the sprites were easier to convert. "The game ran in 16-colour mode, so sprites just needed tweaking to the Sega's lower available colour palette of 512 colours compared to the Amiga's 4,096."

Just like Jon, Stoo is proud of having worked on the game. "The project was really fun to work on. Looking back now, I think we did a really good job of retaining the look and feel that made the Amiga game such a top title."

When asked where the game ranks in the Sensible games he is most proud of, Jon thinks hard for a moment. "The number one has got to be *Sensible World Of Soccer*. I would say *Mega lo Mania* is joint second with *Cannon Fodder*, *Wizkid* – which I love – *Wizball* and *Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit*. It's like asking someone who your favourite child is. I love them all for different reasons."

With *Mega lo Mania* coming so far ahead of the boom of real-time strategy games that would happen later in the Nineties, how does Jon feel about its legacy? "If you read gaming history articles about god games, I don't think *Mega lo Mania* gets enough credit, particularly from American sources," he says. "*Cannon Fodder* is the one that really gets me on that front. There's so much credit given to games like *Command & Conquer*, which kind of treads between *Mega lo Mania* and *Cannon Fodder*. But as long as our game gets credit it's due in the long term, that's all fine. I think we were very lucky to be around at a very exciting time for gaming."

» [Amiga] *Mega lo Mania's* technology design tree adds plenty of strategy to Sensible Software's game.

RGT

Retro Gamer Travels

LOST IN TRANSLATION

How the rest of the world experienced your favourite games

JPN

» [SNES] This snowy scene outside a convenience store doesn't exactly feel like a dangerous back alley.

RANMA 1/2: CHOUNAI GEKITOU HEN

JPN → USA
Japan → USA

RANMA 1/2: CHOUNAI GEKITOU HEN
Departing: 1992

FORMAT
SNES

DEVELOPER
NCS

YEAR
1992

ORIGIN
Japan

LOCALISED FOR
USA

REASONS
Commercial

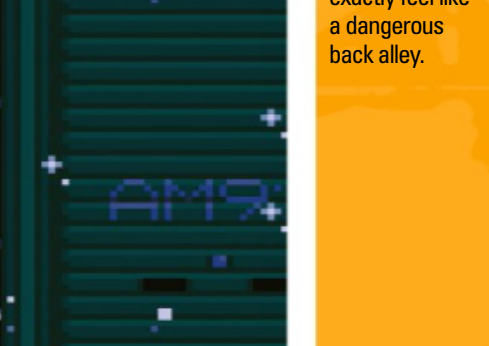
ECONOMY

■ If you're into anime or manga, you're probably well aware of *Ranma 1/2* – it was one of the earliest series to gain popularity among English-speaking fans. For the uninitiated, the series was created by famed author Rumiko Takahashi in 1987 and follows the teenage martial artist Ranma Saotome, who is cursed to transform into a girl when splashed with cold water, and back into a boy if splashed with hot water. By 1992, *Ranma 1/2* had transcended manga and had received adaptations including an anime series, an animated movie and a few videogames. With *Street Fighter II* having given fighting games a new level of prominence, *Ranma 1/2* was a great candidate for a new entry in the genre.

Irem signed up to publish the game in the North American market, but declined to keep the licence. All of the characters were redrawn as a result, keeping the moves and fighting stances but taking on new, generic identities. Some oddities persisted though – male and female Ranma were replaced by combat armour and street clothes versions of Steven. Many of the stages were redrawn too, with two receiving total overhauls and others getting more minor tweaks. Unfortunately, the licence really was doing a lot of the heavy lifting and *Street Combat* had no hope without it, but fans soon had reason to cheer as *Ranma 1/2: Hard Battle* was released internationally with its licence intact in 1993.

USA

» [SNES] This is more comfortable for the American audience – it looks like a fight would happen here.



JPN

» [SNES] Some stages from NCS' game underwent less of a makeover than others in their international transition.

» [SNES] Characters were completely redrawn, but retained original moves like this headstand kick.

USA

GUNNERS HEAVEN

JPN → EUR
Japan → Europe

GUNNERS HEAVEN
Departing: 1995

FORMAT
PlayStation

DEVELOPER
Media. Vision

YEAR
1995

ORIGIN
Japan

LOCALISED FOR
Europe

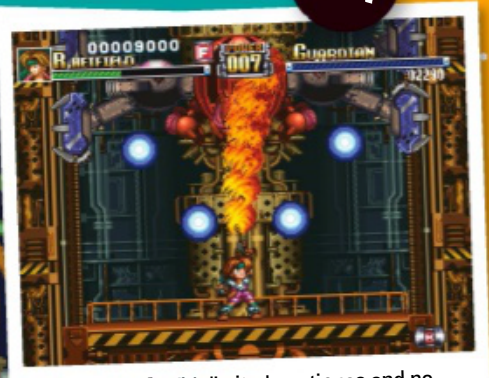
REASONS
Difficulty

DIFFICULTY

■ This PlayStation run-and-gun was clearly inspired by *Gunstar Heroes*. It wasn't quite that good, but it did allow players to cause a worthy amount of carnage. The only problem was that it didn't last too long – although using one of the game's infinite continues would cost you some progress, it only featured six stages.

When the game was brought to PAL territories as *Rapid Reload*, the name wasn't the only thing to change. Players were now limited to nine continues, and the cheat codes available in the Japanese version no longer worked, making for a tougher experience overall. Additionally, the game's plot was retained but all of the Japanese voice acting was removed – not only the longer pieces which were optionally played in story scenes, but the shorter voice clips used during gameplay too.

» [PlayStation] These scenes were voice acted in *Gunners Heaven*, if you chose to enable that option.



» [PlayStation] With limited continues and no cheats, *Rapid Reload* is a lot harder than its Japanese counterpart.

ALEXI LALAS INTERNATIONAL SOCCER

USA → EUR
USA → Europe

ALEXI LALAS INTERNATIONAL SOCCER
Departing: 1998

FORMAT
PlayStation

DEVELOPER
Z-Axis

YEAR
1998

ORIGIN
USA

LOCALISED FOR
USA

REASONS
Commercial

ECONOMY

■ Somebody at Take Two was very busy prior to the World Cup in 1998, as they managed to take advantage of football fever by attaching a variety of licensing deals to this frankly humdrum game. We know it as *Three Lions*, as it bears the official England team licence and the national crest on the cover. In France it's called *Pro:Foot Contest 98* and Didier Deschamps is on the cover and Robert Di Matteo does the honours for Italy's *Bomba:98 All Champions Challenge*.

The game was developed in the US, where it actually came out in 1999 and was endorsed by Alexi Lalas, whose last national team appearance came before the World Cup. Amusingly, this version doesn't get the official England player names, so you've got to enjoy playing as Shearson, Skoals, Spiceham and Le Sucs – players that the developers clearly had fun renaming.

» [PlayStation] Seaman is renamed to Sperman, by someone who totally knew what they were doing. [USA]

» [PlayStation] All the England lads, with their proper faces and everything. Well, sort of.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

SHINOBI III
Return of the Ninja Master

AS THE STAR OF THE SHINOBI SERIES, JOE MUSASHI HAD BEEN ONE OF SEGA'S MOST DEPENDABLE CHARACTERS FOR YEARS, BUT HIS LAST MEGA DRIVE OUTING TOOK HIM TO NEW HEIGHTS. WE LOOK BACK AT ONE OF THE GREATEST NINJA-THEMED GAMES EVER

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

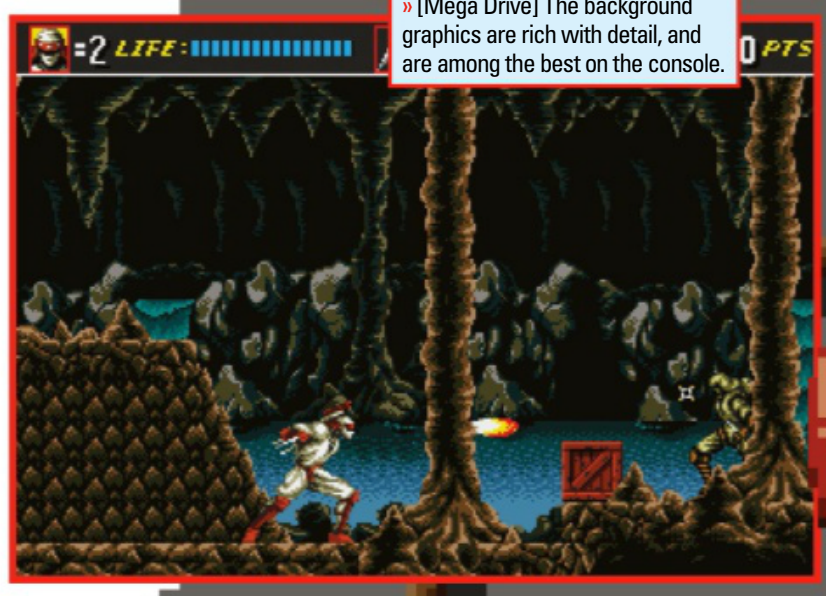
If you were in the market for a Mega Drive during the early days of the console's life, chances are that one of the games that convinced you to take a look was *The Revenge Of Shinobi*. The slick sequel to the hit arcade game evolved the action with new stages, moves and magic, and the soundtrack by Yuzo Koshiro is still revered to this day. Critics loved it, it was a sales hit and it became such a common inclusion on the *Mega Games* compilation cartridges that we'd be surprised if any Mega Drive owner had managed to miss it. There was no question that Sega would put another sequel into production.

What is interesting is that this didn't happen right away. The core team of *The Revenge Of Shinobi*, programmers Keiichi Yamamoto and Matsuhide Mizoguchi and designers Taro Shizuoka and Atsushi Seimiya, went on to develop the excellent Mega Drive conversion of *Strider*. Some staff went on to work on games like *ESWAT* and *QuackShot*, while planner and co-ordinator Noriyoshi Ohba worked on Streets Of Rage, reuniting with Koshiro and Seimiya. When *Shinobi III* finally entered development, it was taken on by a wholly new subsidiary of Sega called Megasoft, with only Ohba remaining as a supervisor to the project.

Shinobi III: Return Of The Ninja Master is a direct sequel to *The Revenge Of Shinobi*, and indeed its Japanese name is *The Super Shinobi II*. The nefarious Neo Zeed, despite Joe Musashi's victory in the previous game, has managed to survive in that uniquely irritating way that organised crime rings so often manage to. That's because the true leader, the Shadow Master, had been operating in the background. Depending on whether you believe the international or Japanese manuals, the organisation is now only slightly weakened, or even more powerful than before. Worse yet, the Shadow Master has supposedly been cloned from Joe's Oboro-clan bloodline, although that particular plot point only appears on the back of the American box. Anyway, you know what that means – as a one-man army, Joe has to go kick enough Neo Zeed bottoms to make them retreat into the shadows once more.

Much like its predecessor, *Shinobi III* primarily consists of linear stages that offer platforming challenges as well as a variety of baddies to beat up, with the occasional boss fight thrown in for good measure. You'll find a great amount of variety here, as Joe ventures from the opening forest to deadly military installations and sinister biological-research facilities. There had been a number of gameplay elements swapped in and out of the *Shinobi* series up to this point, from the original game's hostage rescue theme to the inclusion of the faithful dog Yamato in *Shadow Dancer*. For *Shinobi III*, the most notable addition was forced scrolling levels in which Joe Musashi rode a horse or a motorised surfboard, with

» [Mega Drive] The opening forest area has a brilliant atmosphere, with gently swaying leaves and hidden enemies.



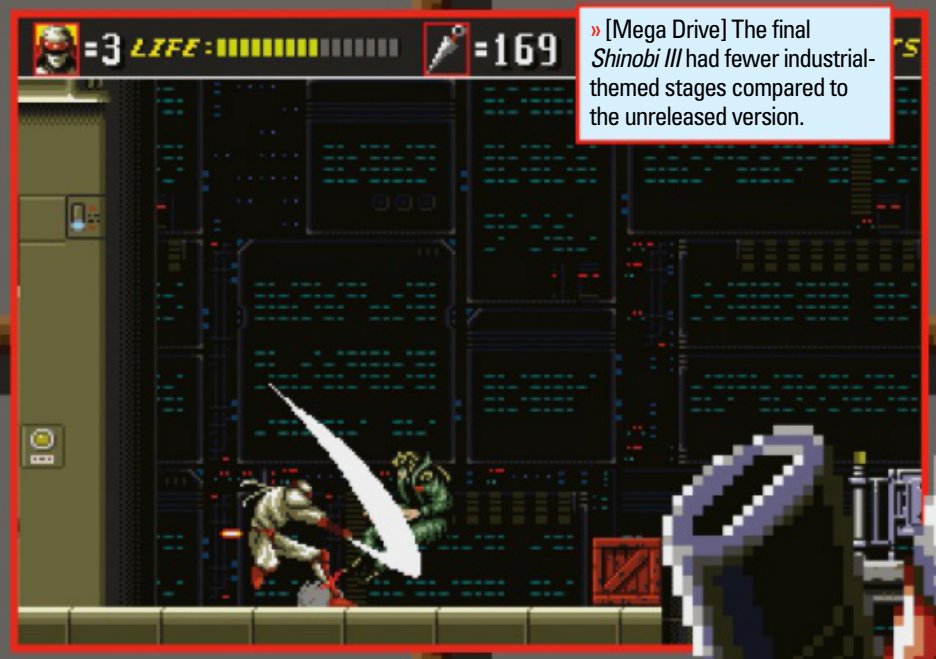
» [Mega Drive] The background graphics are rich with detail, and are among the best on the console.

» [Mega Drive] A couple of mid-bosses are fought during the vehicular stages, such as this tricky ninja.

» [Mega Drive] During the auto-scrolling stages, warning signs ensure fair play when hazards are inbound.

» [Mega Drive] The slime enemies here will take a few hits from your regular shurikens.

» [Mega Drive] Stay on the elevator and you'll be crushed, so it's time to hang tough.



» [Mega Drive] The final *Shinobi III* had fewer industrial-themed stages compared to the unreleased version.

MAGNIFICENT MOVES

SOMERSAULT

■ Press jump again at the height of a regular jump, and Joe will curl up and gain extra height. You can also press your attack button to send out a deadly spray of shurikens.

SPRINTING SLASH

■ Double tap left or right to begin running in that direction. The extra speed is handy, but if you press the attack button, you'll gain a brief bit of invincibility as you swing your sword.

DIVE KICK

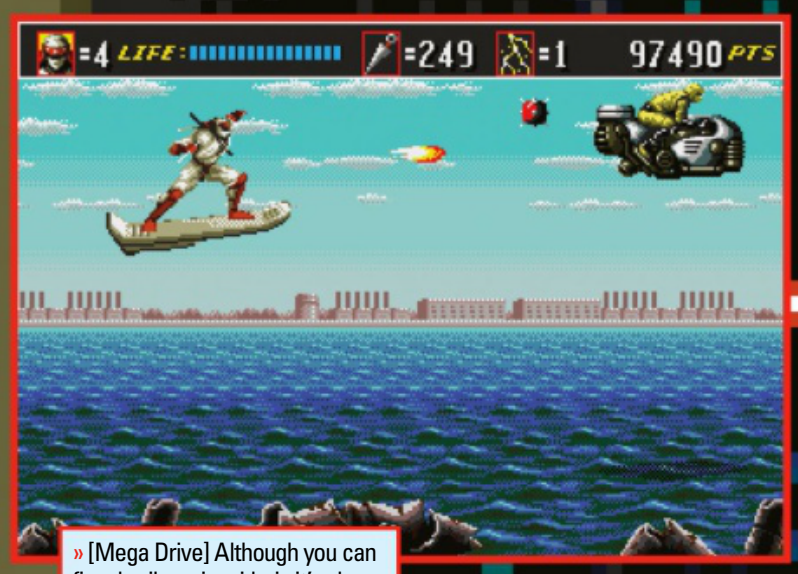
■ During a jump, while Joe is in mid-air, press down and attack. He'll come down and forward in a diagonal motion, kicking enemies in the head and rebounding off them.

WALL JUMP

■ When Joe is directly touching a wall in mid-air, hold the d-pad towards the direction of the wall and press jump for some extra height. This can be repeated as often as needed.

» [Mega Drive] The third stage boss lurks in the background, waiting for a chance at a cheap shot.

» [Mega Drive] This wizard pops up at inopportune moments to blast you with a jet of fire.



» [Mega Drive] Although you can fire shurikens in mid-air, it's also possible to dive kick while surfing.

THE TECHNIQUES YOU'LL NEED TO SEE OFF NEO ZEED

MELEE ATTACK

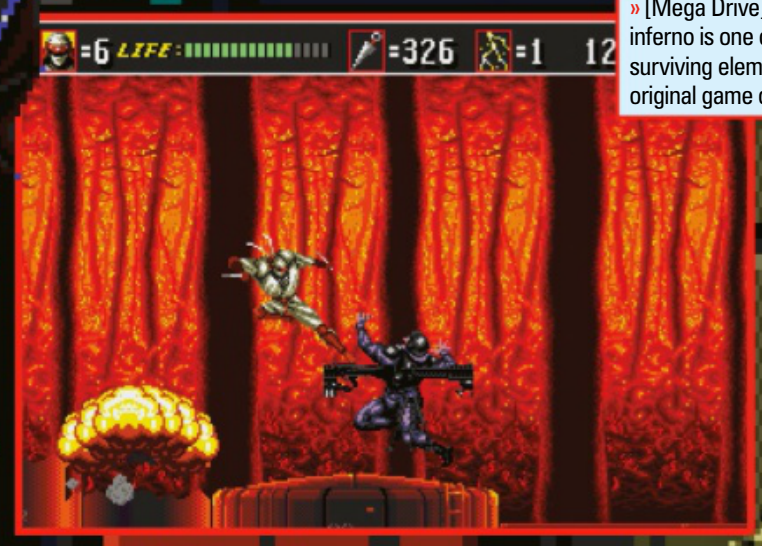
■ Get up close and personal with an enemy and press the attack button to deliver a strong attack that will conserve your shuriken supplies for more desperate moments.

» [Mega Drive] A bomb's about to blow, so there's no choice but to leap to the floating barrels.

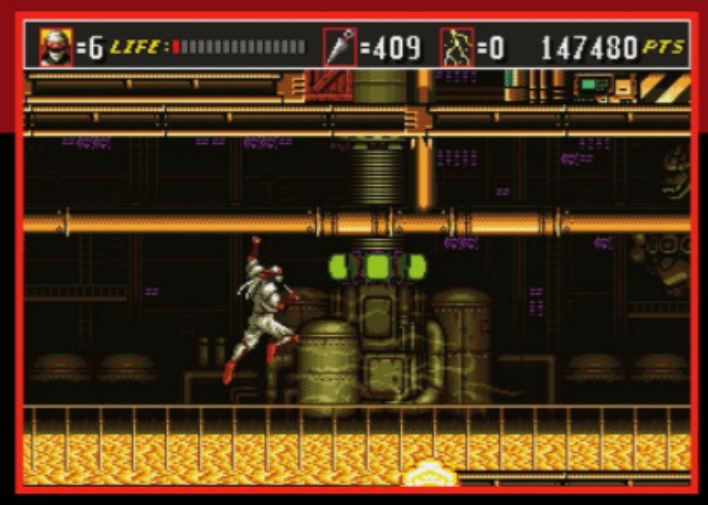
▶ the high speed of approaching obstacles providing the main challenge. These are slightly limited but serve as excellent setpieces, and thankfully they're deployed sparingly enough that they don't wear out their welcome.

That doesn't sound like the basis for a particularly revolutionary sequel, but the biggest change was in the capabilities of Joe Musashi himself. As great as *The Revenge Of Shinobi* was, it was a game that played at a deliberate, considered pace. *Shinobi III* was not only a faster game in general, but it offered a variety of new moves including diving kicks and a sprinting sword slash. The spectacular shuriken-spraying somersault of the previous game returned, and even basic close-range attacks received new animations that looked more dynamic. Other new moves were geared towards traversal, such as the wall jump and overhead climb, and they opened up new level design possibilities while testing your skill. You could see you were playing as a ninja in *The Revenge Of Shinobi*, but with Joe's newfound agility in *Shinobi III*, you could *feel* that you were playing as one.

Shinobi III **launched in Japan in July 1993, and followed to North America and Europe shortly afterwards with some very minor revisions.** Reviews of the game were overall very positive. MegaTech gave the game a score of 93%, with Tom Guise saying that, "It's excellent looking, action-packed, full of secret rooms, has great bosses and is highly atmospheric." Paul Glancey noted that it was "a much easier game overall" than *The Revenge Of Shinobi*, but claimed that it was "mainly because Joe is now a much more versatile character with a wider range of attacks, and he can use his new hanging and jumping-off-walls moves to save himself". Other high scores included 89% from *Mean Machines Sega* and 85% from *Mega Action*. US publications loved it too, as it earned 9/10 from all four reviewers in *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, and an average of 92% from GameFan's four reviewers. ▶



» [Mega Drive] This forest inferno is one of the surviving elements of the original game design.



» [Mega Drive] Joe Musashi clings to the ceiling as the floor below him collapses after an explosion.

CRATE EXPECTATIONS

WHAT EXACTLY LURKS IN THOSE LITTLE WOODEN CONTAINERS OF JOY?

POWER PACK

■ Allows you to deal extra damage with both shurikens and melee attacks. The effect lasts until you next get hit.

SHURIKENS (SMALL)

■ You know those dangerous metal projectiles that Joe throws about? Here are some of those. Don't throw them all in one place.

SHURIKENS (LARGE)

■ This is very much like the small pack, but twice as big – easily enough to have someone's eye out with, we reckon.

HEART (SMALL)

■ A healing item for those of you who can't stay out of trouble. This restores a little bit of Joe's life bar, but not much.

HEART (LARGE)

■ For those with much love to share, here's a bigger version of the healing item, which makes you feel far safer.

EXTRA LIFE

■ Collect a picture of Joe's masked face, and his incredible vanity will afford him another chance at beating the game.

NINJUTSU

■ Wasted your magic on a situation that you thought would be harder than it was, and now need a refill? Grab this, then.

BOMB

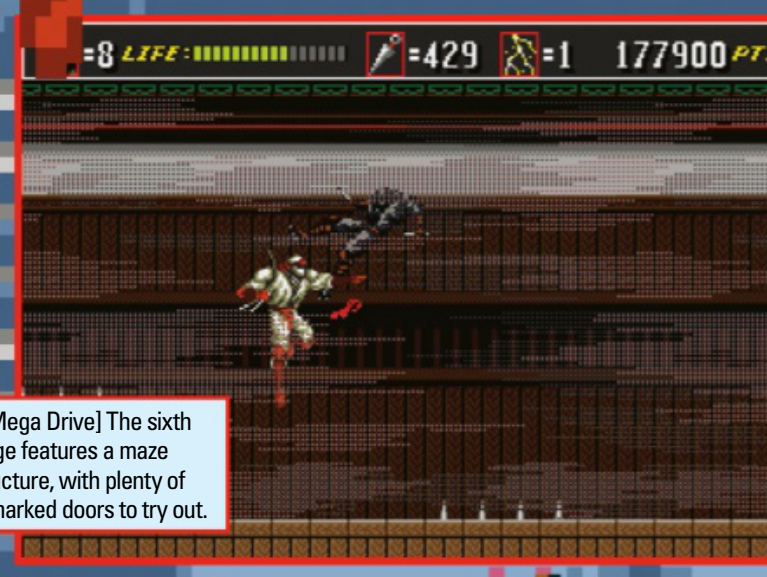
■ This will hurt Joe if he's nearby when it goes off, and the dodgy timer counts quicker when he's near, so you should scarper.

Even the least impressed publications were positive about the game. *Mega* awarded the game 79%, as reviewer Andy Dyer felt that "the graphics have been pumped up quite considerably" and that it had "a good number of imaginative and well-animated enemies", as well as bosses which are "varied, more often than not huge and, best of all, unpredictable in their attack methods". The only major criticism was that it was "far too easy", with too many extra lives and insufficient difficulty options. *Sega Pro* said it was "far too much of the same and it's easier than the previous two", awarding it 80%. Japanese publications were less warm to the game, with *Beep! Mega Drive*'s review team giving it 6.75/10 and *Dengeki Mega Drive*'s four reviewers awarding an average score of 69%.

S*hinobi III* sold well enough for Sega to develop *Shinobi X* for the Saturn, which retained the core gameplay of the series but added digitised graphics and dodgy FMV. Despite this the Megasoft staff were absorbed into other Sega departments, with Noriyoshi Ohba and director Tomoyuki Ito moving on to work together on *Clockwork Knight*. What's more, even with budget reissues available in both Europe and Australia, original Mega Drive copies of *Shinobi III* now fetch a high price of over £100 in all regions. Thankfully Sega has been prolific in its reissues of Mega Drive games so it's not hard to get hold of on other formats, with it appearing in three successive generations of Mega Drive compilations including the most recent one, Sega Mega Drive Classics for PS4, Xbox One, Switch and PC.

If you're a fan of ninja-themed games or platform games in general and you're stuck for what to play next, *Shinobi III* should be very high up on your list. It's a great-looking game with an excellent soundtrack. It's got brilliant setpieces and level design that remains consistently interesting, but above all else, it has a main character who is just a joy to control. This is a game where beating up hapless grunts in the first stage is just as fun as taking out the gigantic bosses, where you really do feel like an almost superhuman death dealer. The *Shinobi* series has given us some great games over the years, but *Shinobi III* may well be the very greatest of the bunch. ✱

» [Mega Drive] This mid-boss was originally fought against an ocean background, but ended up here.



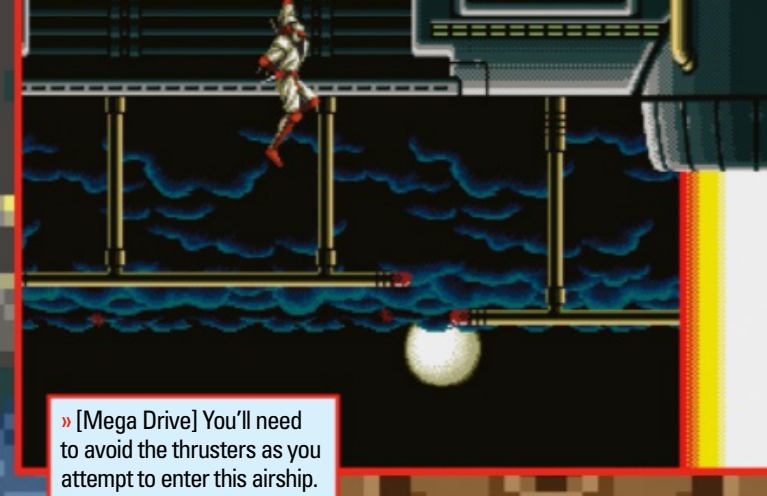
» [Mega Drive] The sixth stage features a maze structure, with plenty of unmarked doors to try out.

ADDITIONAL TRAINING

LOOKING BACK AT SHINOBI III'S ABANDONED FIRST RELEASE

The game we know as *Shinobi III* today isn't the team's original stab at the concept. In fact, the game was first completed around the end of 1992, and sent out to a number of magazines for review. This early version of the game didn't feature any of the horseback or surfing levels, but did feature a number of levels not included in the final game. These included a rocky stage set at night, featuring enemy tigers, and other stages such as the outside of a rocket readying for launch. The bosses were generally retained in some fashion, but most of the stages were heavily reworked even if their concepts were kept.

Reviewers generally scored this version highly, but expressed some disappointment in it. *Mean Machines Sega* gave the game 88%, but Rich Leadbetter felt it was "not quite as strong as the original game". *MegaTech*'s Tom Guise also gave it 88%, and felt that "the playability is still top-notch", but that the levels were "samey and uninteresting". *Sega Pro*'s Dino Boni, in an 89% review, felt that "the backgrounds range from okay to downright boring". As a result, Sega took the game back into development. A prototype exists, but is rather different to both this version and the final.



» [Mega Drive] You'll need to avoid the thrusters as you attempt to enter this airship.

BOSS RUSH

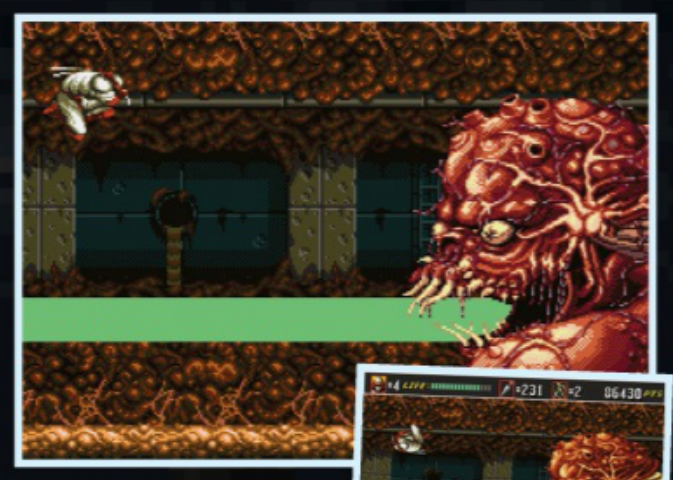
THE BIGGEST BADDIES NEO ZEED CAN THROW AT YOU, AND HOW TO BEAT THEM

STAGE 1

■ This multi-limbed terror looks intimidating, but isn't actually too tough. It's vulnerable to a running slash whenever it isn't attacking, so hit it with one of those. It'll then rear back and attempt to charge you, so be ready to jump – maybe even somersault, just to be safe. There are no alternative phases here, so this is very simple.

STAGE 2

■ When the screen is normal, this floating brain can be attacked so long as it isn't blasting electricity – if it is, your shurikens will be deflected. Try to time your attacks for when it attempts to drop on top of you. Whenever the screen is warping, your controls will be reversed, so take evasive action as best you can.



STAGE 3

■ The eye is the weak point of this mutated freak. When you hit it, it'll attempt to swipe at you with its hand, which you'll need to avoid a couple of times. Try to attack when it's on the far right of the screen to give yourself room to move. Watch out for its mouth laser attack – if you get hit, it's very damaging.

STAGE 4

■ Fling shurikens as fast as you can to start. Once this battle robot picks up its attachments, the real fight begins. You'll need to take out the gun-arm first, followed by the chained-shield one, each of which reduces its combat capabilities. The main body is pretty resilient once those are gone, but keep at it.

STAGE 5

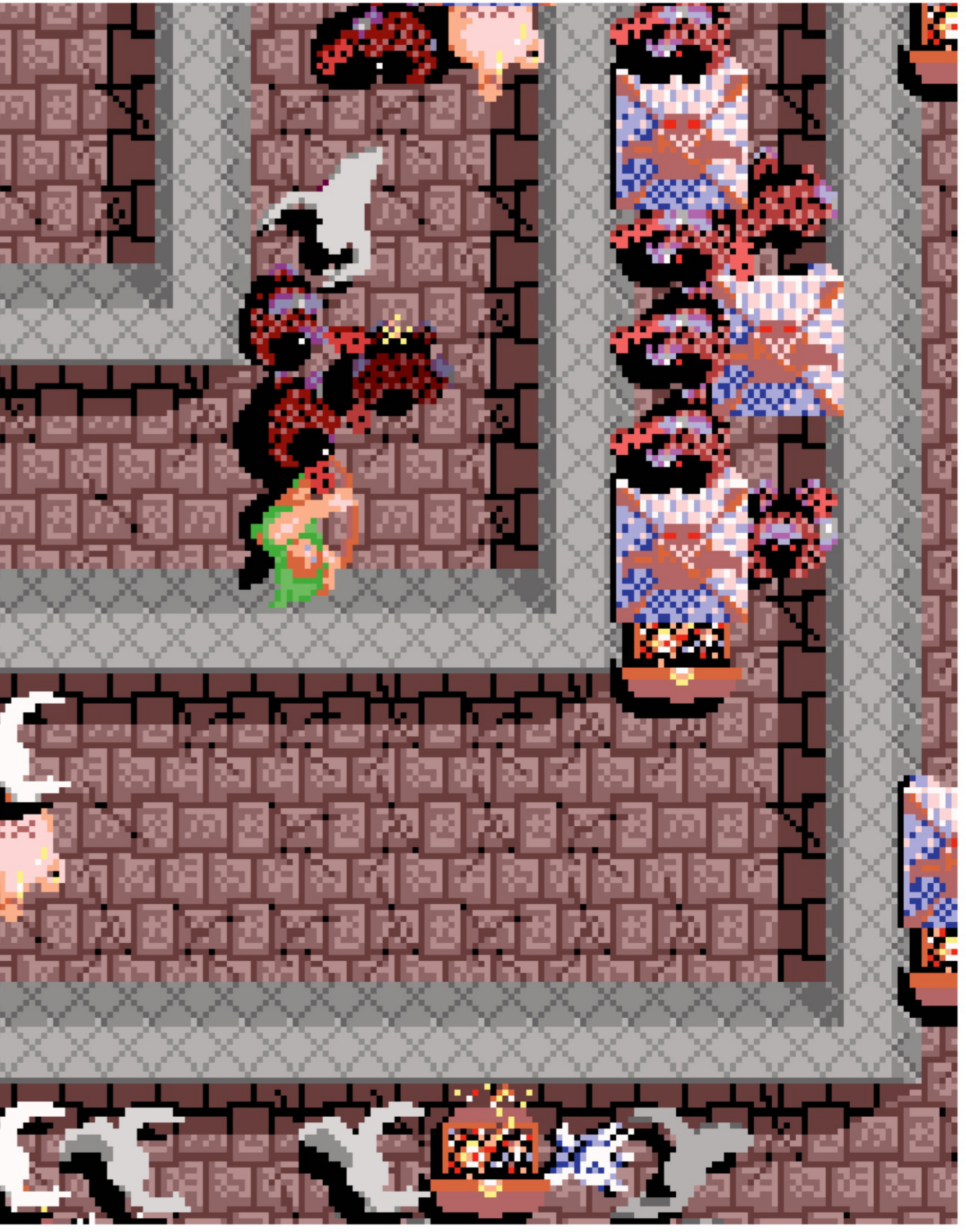
■ Keep your distance from this mechanical monstrosity, as its fire breath has very long range. Attack the head to begin with, and when that's destroyed, aim for the control system in its neck. The chest lasers can be tricky to avoid – the trick is to time your jump between when the second and third one are fired.

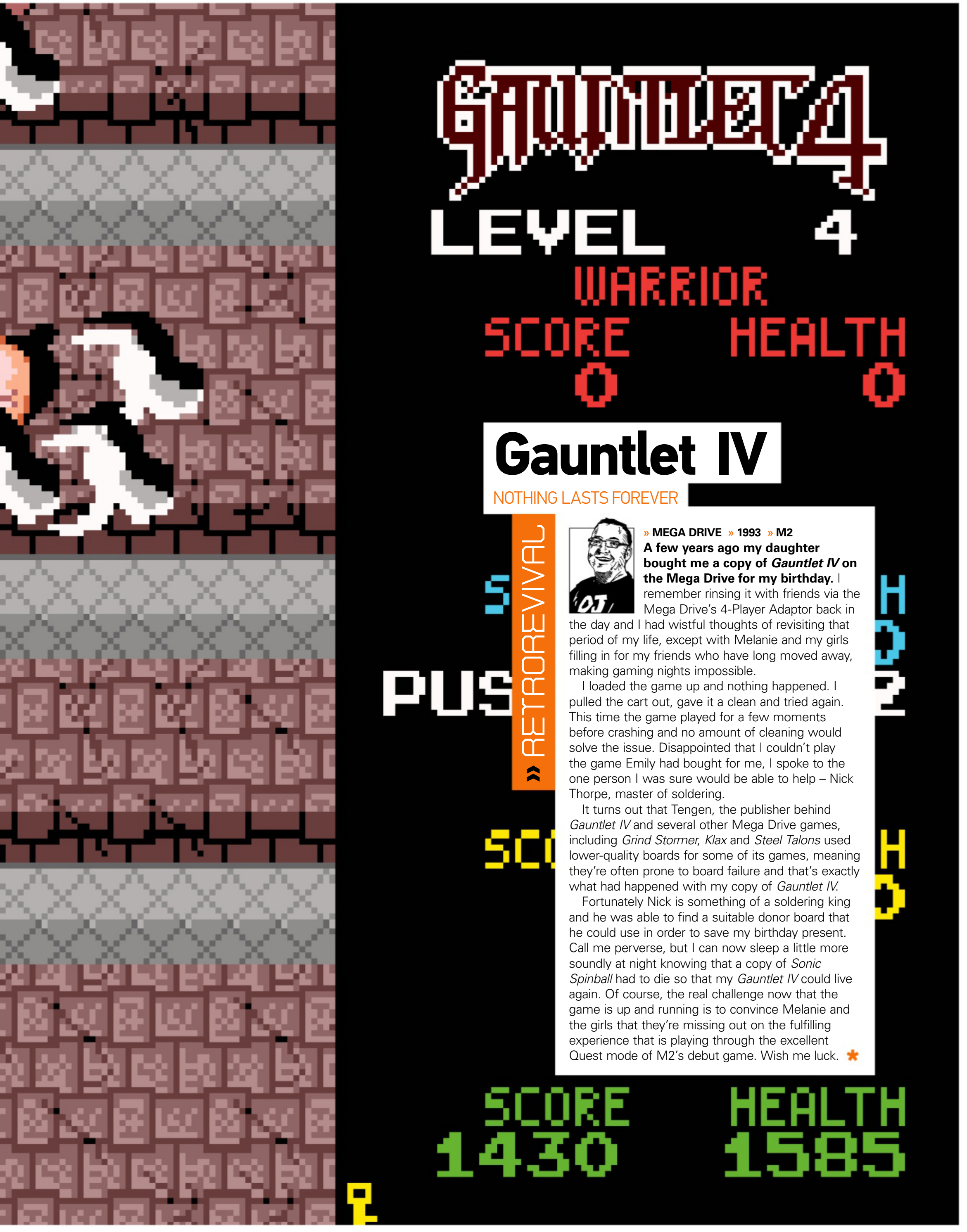
STAGE 6

■ Does this villain look familiar? In the first phase, two shadowy versions will appear from behind the doors – you'll need to hit the real one to light it up and do damage. In the second phase of the fight, you'll lose all of your shurikens and be forced to battle hand to hand, while he runs around the room throwing deadly fans.

STAGE 7

■ You've made it to the Shadow Master, and it's a very tricky fight. He's fast and can throw shurikens, dragon punches and dive kicks, as well as shower the bizarre fighting arena with energy attacks. Do your best to learn his patterns, but don't be afraid to use your Mijin ninjutsu to sacrifice a life for major damage.





Gauntlet IV

NOTHING LASTS FOREVER

» RETROREVIVAL

» MEGA DRIVE » 1993 » M2

A few years ago my daughter bought me a copy of *Gauntlet IV* on the Mega Drive for my birthday. I remember rinsing it with friends via the Mega Drive's 4-Player Adaptor back in the day and I had wistful thoughts of revisiting that period of my life, except with Melanie and my girls filling in for my friends who have long moved away, making gaming nights impossible.

I loaded the game up and nothing happened. I pulled the cart out, gave it a clean and tried again. This time the game played for a few moments before crashing and no amount of cleaning would solve the issue. Disappointed that I couldn't play the game Emily had bought for me, I spoke to the one person I was sure would be able to help – Nick Thorpe, master of soldering.

It turns out that Tengen, the publisher behind *Gauntlet IV* and several other Mega Drive games, including *Grind Stormer*, *Klax* and *Steel Talons* used lower-quality boards for some of its games, meaning they're often prone to board failure and that's exactly what had happened with my copy of *Gauntlet IV*.

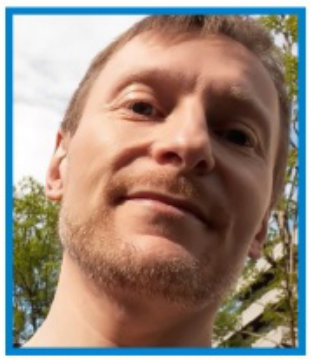
Fortunately Nick is something of a soldering king and he was able to find a suitable donor board that he could use in order to save my birthday present. Call me perverse, but I can now sleep a little more soundly at night knowing that a copy of *Sonic Spinball* had to die so that my *Gauntlet IV* could live again. Of course, the real challenge now that the game is up and running is to convince Melanie and the girls that they're missing out on the fulfilling experience that is playing through the excellent Quest mode of M2's debut game. Wish me luck. *

THE HISTORY OF SCREAMER

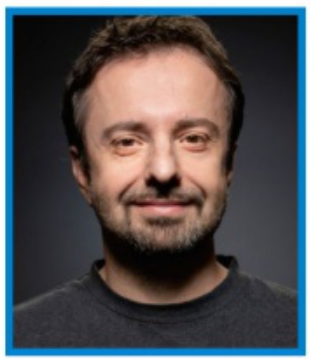
THE REIGN OF JAPAN AS THE KING OF ARCADE RACING SEEMED HARD TO CHALLENGE. FROM COIN-OPS TO CONSOLES, IT SEEMED TO ALWAYS BE THE BEST IN THE CATEGORY. BUT SUDDENLY, IN 1995, A NEW CHALLENGER MADE ITS DEBUT: MILESTONE WITH ITS SCREAMER SERIES

WORDS BY DAMIANO GERLI

» Antonio Farina started Graffiti (later Milestone) in 1993.



» Ivan Del Duca made C64 games before joining Graffiti.



» Marco Spitoni started at Graffiti as a graphics artist.

» Stefano Lecchi was an early member of Graffiti.

Once upon a time, arcade racing seemed to be very much a genre with a secret recipe which only Japanese developers seemed to have access to. Ever since the Eighties, with classic coin-ops like *Pole Position*, *Out Run* and *Chase HQ*, all the best racers seemed to only come out of Japan. A trend which continued with the jump to 3D and polygonal graphics, thanks to hits like Sega's *Daytona USA* and Namco's *Ridge Racer*. But by the mid-Nineties, things changed. The new hot series suddenly was *Screamer*, a newcomer which almost managed to defeat its rivals, at least in the home-computer market.

The first in the series was developed in 1995 by Milan software house Graffiti, a company created by Antonio Farina after leaving his previous job. "Idea Software, where I worked from 1989 to 1992, was not really a software house, rather a single-desk office, mine, where I kept contacts with many developers all over Italy to work on several projects. I acted as a producer while also, sometimes, creating the original ideas for these projects," remembers Antonio. Indeed, Idea was created by Italian distributor Leader in order to differentiate its market presence, but it did not seem to be a venture it had intention to invest much on. "At the end of 1992," continues Antonio, "I asked Leader's management to provide us with more funds, since I wanted to rent a bigger office, and fill it with state-of-the-art computers. My intention was to create an actual studio, like I saw many companies doing all over the world, so that developers could work a nine-to-five job. They denied the request, so I had no other choice but to leave." Idea would close a few months after Antonio's departure.

In creating this new software house, Antonio's main objective was competing with the international market. "I was sick of hearing this tired stereotype that a game wasn't bad, for being made in Italy. We deserved better than that. Either a game was good for everyone all over the world or it just wasn't." Instead of resorting to publishing ads in magazines to scout talents, as many other Italian studios used to do at the time, Antonio decided to, instead, directly contact several of the talented programmers and graphic artists he had already worked with. Among the first he phoned up were Ivan Del Duca and Stefano Lecchi.

> *"I WAS SICK OF HEARING THIS TIRED STEREOTYPE THAT A GAME WASN'T BAD, FOR BEING MADE IN ITALY. WE DESERVED BETTER THAN THAT"*
> ***ANTONIO FARINA***

Ivan remembers that, in 1993, he already had a bit of a history developing racing games. Together with his friend Antonio Miscellaneo they had worked on a Commodore 64 conversion of top-down racer *Warm Up*, published by Genias. "As I remember it, Antonio [Farina] called me because he had made a deal with Audiogenic to develop a Super Nintendo game. Since I was familiar with the 6502 architecture of the original Commodore 64, it would have been relatively easy for me to work on Nintendo's

» [PC] Gentlemen, start your engines!

» [PC] Up close, the polygonal models don't really hold up but you won't notice it.

console which shared the same, upgraded, technology." Stefano, meanwhile, had been working on a 3D engine which would later be used for mech-simulation *Iron Assault*.

Graffiti's first work was indeed *Super Loopz* for Audiogenic, the one-and-only Super Nintendo title developed by an Italian team. After the successful release, Ivan Del Duca would work for a couple of months, together with graphic artist Marco Spitoni, also among the first people called by Antonio Farina, on an isometric rally game for Super Nintendo, but they never managed to find a publisher interested in it. After shelving the project and pondering about their next move, a young kid named Antonio Martini shows up at Graffiti's office in Milan, with a CD in his hand. "He showed us quite the impressive 3D demo," remembers Antonio Farina, "even though it did look slightly generic." Marco

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

IRON ASSAULT WAS THE ONLY NON-RACING GAME DEVELOPED BY MILESTONE IN THE NINETIES

***Iron Assault* was the first title that Graffiti started developing, shortly after the studio was founded in Milan. Despite being almost completed in 1994, the game was put on the backburner while the team worked around the clock to complete *Screamer* in as little time as possible. Inspired by *MechWarrior*, the game lets the player choose and arm a mech, then go on missions to save the Earth from the threat of mega corporations. Programmer Stefano Lecchi remembers being basically left alone to solve the bugs on *Iron Assault*, as it was a project he had brought over to the studio. He mentions the 3D engine being developed as an evolution of what he had seen in *Wolfenstein 3D*, so much so that when *Doom* came out he remembers feeling a sense of unease, since *Iron Assault* already looked outdated. *Iron Assault* also used cutscenes featuring mechs built with plasticine, shot in stop motion by Marco Spitoni, who also designed the models, while Ivan Del Duca worked on sound and music. Received with moderate enthusiasm by critics and the public, it also ended up being outshined by *Screamer*, with Virgin spending little on its marketing. Today, it is rarely remembered, more often as a curiosity for its status as one of the very few non-racing titles developed by Milestone.**

» [PC] You can definitely notice *Screamer* was published by Virgin…

» [PC] *Screamer 2*'s track selection may seem paltry but it was par for the course in the Nineties.

TRACK ATTACK

WE REVISIT SOME OF THE BEST TRACKS IN THE SERIES

The Screamer series definitely features a varied selection of tracks, from the overall relaxing and fun arcade-like offerings of the original, to the challenging layouts that feature in the later games. Sunbeach Hill is one particular standout from Screamer, as it looks relaxing and laid back with its palm trees and a lighthouse, but it also requires some attentive driving. Sandrock, featuring cacti and oil rigs, is the final track in the original title, and also one that will demand the most attention from the player. The California track from Screamer 2 features some of the most beautiful scenery from the entire series, but don't let the backgrounds distract from the driving because, while not the most difficult one from the series, it will still challenge many drivers. The Tunnel is a hidden track in Screamer 2 which, as the title indicates, all takes place in neon galleries full of dangerous curves. Also, no list of the best tracks from the Screamer series would be complete without mentioning the Italy track from Screamer Rally. It definitely takes some cues from real places in Tuscany, with beautiful poplar trees and villas that might easily distract the driver from the tight corners in the rustic towns, perfect to practice one's drift around in.

continues, "It featured a spaceship flying through buildings. We modified it, by putting a race car on a simple track, with no crazy loops or anything." Indeed, that demo would turn heads at the 1994 ECTS in London, especially because there was not an arcade racing scene on the PC. Antonio Farina comes back from that event with a publishing agreement with Virgin Interactive for two games. Still, he mentions, the attention of the publisher was clearly on *Screamer* and so, he ordered his guys to complete it as fast as possible.

Marco Spitoni worked on the textures and overall look of the cars. He remembers how Virgin was quite attentive towards the project, even coming to Milan to test out an early version of *Screamer*. "I think we were quite a talented team of developers, but definitely not the most professional. Just a bunch of young rowdy Italians! We had clearly never worked with such a big publisher. I remember when we pitched them the first magazine ads that we made ourselves. They did indeed strongly feature beer, and Virgin rejected them as they did not want to associate alcohol with a racing game!"

Virgin also suggested additional racing modes, like the Track Attack, remembers Marco, guiding the team towards the release of a successful product. "A team of journalists, sponsored by the publisher, also came to see a beta version of *Screamer* in Milan. They were playing multiplayer in small groups, all hollering and screaming, really having the time of their lives. To this day it is still one of the best things I've seen in my life, it was fantastic seeing people having so much fun with our game!" says Marco with a tinge of nostalgia.

> "I THINK WE WERE QUITE A TALENTED TEAM OF DEVELOPERS, BUT DEFINITELY NOT THE MOST PROFESSIONAL"
> **MARCO SPITONI**

Ivan tells how the entire project was developed in crunch mode, "It took us something like six months from start to finish, entirely working all around the clock almost every day of the week. Honestly, most of us did not seem to mind, we were young and full of enthusiasm, and Antonio was very good at leading us on." Their big inspirations were *Virtua Racing*, *Daytona USA* and *Ridge Racer*, classic arcade racers which were only available on console. Marco remembers, "We had *Daytona* on PlayStation and we played it non stop, trying to get as much inspiration as possible: that game's sense of speed was something. For the graphics, I used an early graphical application, Photostyler, which despite being a bit primitive, still felt like a huge jump from the 256 colours I was used to on Deluxe Paint!" The soundtrack was composed by classic Amiga musician Allister Brimble, whom Ivan mentions as one of his childhood heroes, so much so that he remembers working with Allister as the high point of the experience.

Screamer came out to quite the unexpected acclaim by the public and critics, especially for Graffiti. Thanks to a strong marketing push by Virgin, it ended up being the first truly successful international title developed by an Italian team. Antonio Farina was proved right in his wanting to aim higher. Marco mentions the whole marketing aspect as being incredibly fascinating, since they had never worked with such a big professional publisher. "A friend of mine was in Paris, and he called me up excitedly because he saw *Screamer* running on a big screen in a Virgin Megastore, since the credits featured, 'Graphics by Marco Spitoni.'" To this day, it is easily the most remembered videogame to come out of Italy, at least from the Nineties. Right after the successful release of *Screamer*, Graffiti went through a series of changes, becoming Milestone, a name and company still going strong today. "The company was originally supposed to be one where all the devs had

» [PC] Crash commencing in 3, 2, 1…

» [PC] *Screamer 2* debuted a full cockpit for a more realistic driving experience.

» [PC] You're so close to first place. Push it, push it a little more.

» [PC] Smoking the opponents? Not really, but there's a lot of smoke anyway

equal shares. Right after the success of *Screamer*, Antonio realised it wasn't probably the best business idea and transformed it into an ordinary company," remembers Ivan.

But, the successful release of the game was marred by a copyright issue. The American software house Papyrus issued a legal case against Virgin because the engine sound in *Screamer* seemed to be lifted directly from their 1994 racing game, *NASCAR Racing*. Ivan admits the blunder, "Honestly, up until that moment, game development in Italy had always been quite amateurish. We were definitely lacking the know-how to record a proper engine sound. So, borrowing one from another game and slightly modifying it, did not seem to be a big deal to us. Everyone in the team knew about it, Antonio [Farina] included, since we thought, 'Who is gonna find out? Papyrus is an American company and they are thousands of kilometres away!' But yes, they noticed and the Papyrus legal team did make sure that we would never do anything like that ever again…" Apparently, the case was won by Papyrus with Virgin having to pay the team an undisclosed amount of money, so that they could keep the sound in the game.

The sequel, *Screamer 2*, shifts the focus of the series from arcade to simulation, as Antonio Farina and Ivan Del Duca both mention their inspiration was now *Sega Rally*, rather than *Daytona USA*. Was it a decision influenced by the changes in the market or an inspiration by the team? Antonio answers, "It was absolutely a commercial decision, since we saw the success of a driving model which was closer to simulation, with the arcade style of racing being on a decline." *Screamer 2*, while not an instant sequel, was definitely programmed in a short time as well. Ivan remembers he did most of it by himself, "As opposed to *Screamer* which was more of a collaborative effort, this time it was me on most of the game: I did the multiplayer, 3D menu, sounds, development kit and a lot of more that I'm probably forgetting about. We updated the original graphical engine a bit, but it was not that different, the only big change was the driving model. I started honing my craft on the car physics and the *dynamics*." Development would take about a year. The sequel would also be the first game in the series to use 3D acceleration, after a patch was released shortly after the debut of the game. Marco mentions *Screamer 2* as the moment the team went full-on professional, even though, "As a small software house, Milestone at the time was still quite a madhouse." The graphic artist also adds, "Finishing these games was quite the accomplishment, after both our first two titles for Virgin had been shipped, I decided to take a full month off, no notice or anything!"

With the sequel also going on to enjoy both national and international success, Virgin would request one more title in the series, which would come in the way of *Screamer Rally*. As the title makes clear, the 1997 game continues down the road of the slightly more realistic driving model that programmer Ivan and the team were working on. With the success of *Sega Rally* and similar series like Codemasters' *Colin McRae Rally*, the third *Screamer* title embraces a more realistic racing simulation, while bringing the gameplay closer to a rally experience with dirt and snowy tracks. Marco recalls the graphics were made by a small three-person team. "I remember we asked

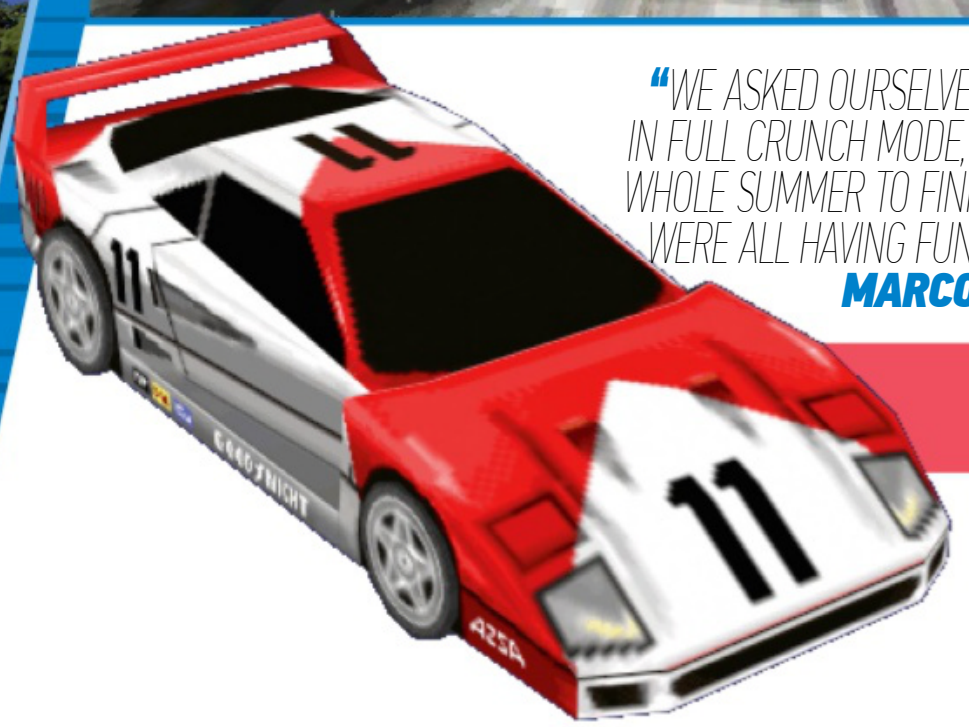
» [PC] The action in *Screamer Rally* takes place on a lot of dirt tracks

SCREAMER'S INSPIRATION

THE ARCADE RACERS THAT INFLUENCED SCREAMER

All of the Screamer developers have no doubts on which were the major inspirations on the series. First, Daytona USA and Ridge Racer, while Sega Rally was definitely an influence for the later instalments of Screamer. Namco's Ridge Racer was released in 1993, first in the arcades and then ported to the PlayStation, it was based on a popular hobby of young Japanese people: racing expensive cars on mountain tracks while dangerously drifting around. Daytona USA was developed by Sega with the purpose of having a title that could rival Namco's, an arcade racer which would make full use of the Sega Arcade 2 board. Using its experience on its previous 3D title, Virtua Racer, the Sega AM2 team extensively researched NASCAR races to develop a title that was also simulative. The influence on the original Screamer can clearly be felt, as Graffiti was trying to replicate as much as possible the great sense of speed in Daytona. Sega Rally, first released in the arcades in 1994 then ported to the Sega Saturn, was the first arcade racing title to incorporate different handling of the car on terrains, which ended up being a huge influence on the future whole subgenre of rally games. Sega's hybrid of arcade and simulation would be the driving force for titles like Screamer 2 and, clearly, Screamer Rally.

» [PC] Make way, coming through!



> "WE ASKED OURSELVES, 'ARE WE GOING IN FULL CRUNCH MODE, STAYING HERE THE WHOLE SUMMER TO FINISH THE GAME?' WE WERE ALL HAVING FUN SO WE AGREED"
>
> **MARCO SPITONI**

» [PC] *Screamer Rally* lets you race through quaint rustic Italian towns.

SCREAMER'S LEGACY

SCREAMER WAS THE BEGINNING FOR MILESTONE, BUT WHAT OTHER GAMES HAS IT DEVELOPED?

With the success of the original Screamer, along with its two sequels, in the course of a few years Milestone went from being a small Italian team, to the top developers in the world for racing games. Since 1995, it has been going on strong, developing mostly racing games, with the exception of a couple of talent show related tie-ins like The X Factor Sing. Superbike World Championship, originally released in 1999, was the first title developed for Electronic Arts, and Milestone's first attempt at simulating motorbike racing. The series would later jump ship, becoming MotoGP, a yearly released series of titles which (with the exception of three titles developed by Capcom), has been a staple of Milestone to this day, with the recent release of MotoGP 22. Apex from 2003, while still a racing game, was something of a different beast from the usual racing titles, with the player tasked with driving prototypes of cars they would build themselves. It was also the first console (Xbox exclusive) title developed by Milestone. The company would go back to its old love for rally games in 2010, with the well-received World Rally Championship, which also became its own series. In 2018, the company would also go back to developing off-road titles, this time in the style of Screamer 4X4, with the release of Gravel.

» [PC] You can see how much more technically impressive *Screamer Rally* is to its predecessors.

"WE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH 4X4. VIRGIN PROBABLY HAD ANOTHER RACING GAME ON THEIR HANDS WHICH THEY DECIDED TO PUBLISH. I NEVER EVEN PLAYED IT"

IVAN DEL DUCA

ourselves, 'Are we going in full crunch mode, staying here the whole summer to finish the game?' We were all having fun and so we agreed. And the CEO never rewarded us for it! I remember that all he did was bring back from his summer vacation several souvenir cups with our names on them. That was it. We made fun of him endlessly for that," laughs Marco.

Ivan mentions that, along with the shifts in inspiration, there was another reason that it was a pure rally game, as that was the quickest way to churn out a sequel by using the *Screamer 2* graphical assets. "Despite, over the years, many people seemed to mention how they remember *Rally* more fondly than *Screamer 2*, I still think the latter was the superior title," comments the programmer. "*Rally* was really little more than a *Screamer 2* add-on: we just added a few new tracks and cars. I don't think there was anything new even in the driving model. While it would be easy to dismiss it as a cash-grab, it was still a pretty decent racing title, despite not really being our best work." *Rally* still goes on to enjoy quite the success, but the team was already moving on to quite a different project, studying how to simulate a realistic driving model for a motorbike on a race track, a project that eventually became the EA Sports published *Superbike World Championship*.

Despite Milestone being busy with other projects, three years after the release of *Rally*, another title in the series would be released: *Screamer 4X4*. Antonio Farina remembers that the team could not have developed the game even if they wanted to. "In 1998 we were already working on *Superbike World Championship*, there was no way we could develop two games at the same time with the small team we had at the time," he says. The English publisher, Virgin, apparently decided to go ahead and develop its own take on the *Screamer* series. "I don't even think they asked us for an opinion or anything, they just went ahead with a completely different development team and 3D engine," remembers Antonio. "We definitely had nothing to do with *4X4*," Ivan chimes in. "Virgin probably had another racing game on their hands which they decided to publish under a name that was already quite familiar with the public. I never even played it."

» [PC] *Screamer 4X4* didn't appreciate us mowing down spectators…

» [PC] A different developer was behind *Screamer 4X4* and it shows.

Screamer 4X4, released in December 2000 in Europe, was developed by a Hungarian team, Clever's Games, led by László Német. The game was the first in the *Screamer* series to feature officially licensed cars, from brands like Volvo and Range Rover. As opposed to the other *Screamer* titles, there are no opponents on the track, the objective is to complete a race by passing all checkpoints with as few penalties as possible. The final chapter in the series was still, overall, well-received by critics, with Eurogamer citing it as "the best 4WD game yet". Still, *Screamer 4X4* definitely sold less than the rest of the series, with the publisher retiring the brand right after its release. In 2001, Clever's Games would develop a sort of spiritual successor to *Screamer 4X4*, released under the title *Cabela's 4X4 Off Road Adventure*, which – in continuing their 'tradition' – was also a sequel of a game developed by another team.

With the *Screamer* series ending with a whimper, rather than a bang, Milestone would shift its focus on pure simulation racing titles, first with the *Superbike* series then, going back to cars, with titles like *Alfa Romeo Racing Italiano* and *FIA WRC Rally*. Many of the developers still have fond memories of working on the *Screamer* games, especially of the fun team environment. "One of the greatest memories I'll always have are the huge Friday afternoon LAN parties we would usually make, which Farina hated us for!" remembers Marco, who now works for Peter Jackson's Weta Workshop. Antonio Farina would leave Milestone in 2007 to focus on other videogame related projects, while Ivan Del Duca would also follow, now he is director of technology for 505 Games.

Peripheral Vision

ASCII Grip

» **PLATFORM:** PlayStation » **RELEASED:** 1996
» **COST:** £24.99 (launch), £20+ (today, boxed), £8+ (today, unboxed)

Have you ever bemoaned the fact that your regular console controller doesn't allow you to play games and hold a drink at the same time? If so, you may enjoy the ASCII Grip – a pad that is designed to be used with one hand. Most of the standard face and shoulder buttons are located on the front of the controller, but the important cross and circle buttons are located on the underside of the device, so that you don't need to move your thumb from the d-pad.

The ASCII Grip was officially licensed by Sony in all major regions, and although it has all of the functions of a regular PlayStation controller, it is better suited to some genres than others. The packaging recommends it as being ideal for RPGs and simulation games and Japanese gamers could even pick up a bundle with the controller and *Derby Stallion*, ASCII's own horse-racing simulation. With three button modes including one with programmable functions, the ASCII Grip is also particularly useful for players who only have the use of one hand. *

ESSENTIAL GAME

BUST-A-MOVE 2

Although not specifically marketed for puzzle games, the ASCII Grip is well suited to many of them as they often have simple control schemes. Taito's *Bubble Bobble* spin-off is just one of them, requiring just the d-pad and a single button to aim and fire your bubbles, and it's also a true classic of the genre. The game was particularly popular on the PlayStation and received three re-releases in Europe under the Platinum, Value Series and Acclaimed Range budget labels, so it can easily be found for less than £5.

ASCII Grip fact

- ASCII had previously released a Super Famicom version of the Grip in Japan, and would later release versions for the Saturn and PlayStation 2.

SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

STUDIO PROFILE

DIGITAL ECLIPSE

Thirty years ago saw the foundation of a small startup operating out of Emeryville, California that would change the way we played classic videogames on modern systems. **Retro Gamer** calls on founder/CEO Andrew Ayre and president Mike Mika to reveal the rich and storied history of Digital Eclipse

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

Here at Retro Gamer we depend on emulation. Without access to emulators, the job of illustrating features like this would be so much trickier. It'd be like stepping back in time 30 years, using a combination of photography and Heath Robinson capture devices to grab screenshots. Nightmare.

We rely on emulation, yet many often take it for granted. Emulators for almost every old system are available, either as free/shareware or as part of commercial retro-game packages. They're so convenient that it's easy to forget there was a time when emulating old games seemed like sorcery. This was particularly true of the coin-ops that we'd marvel at in the arcades. Then in 1994, Digital Eclipse conjured up versions of classic Williams games *Joust*, *Defender* and *Robotron: 2084* for the Apple Mac. Commercial releases like this weren't new – *Microsoft Arcade* and Activision's *Atari 2600 Action Pack* were already available – but those titles were reprogrammed and/or ran in a small window. Thanks to Digital Eclipse and programmer Jeff Vavasour, you could play 100% accurate renditions and they ran at full speed in full screen. This was because Digital Eclipse emulated the Motorola 6809 CPU which powered the Williams games, so you were playing the actual arcade code, foibles and all.

The three Williams games were later released in a package called *The Digital Arcade* for both Mac and PC. In 1996 three more games were added – *Stargate* (aka *Defender II*), *Sinistar* and *Bubbles* – and the pack was retitled *Williams Arcade's Greatest Hits* and released for a wide number of formats including PlayStation and Saturn. For fans, the CD versions also featured video clips where the likes of Eugene Jarvis, John

» [Arcade] The firm's first release was the arcade flap-'em-up *Joust*. Later releases featured a video interview with the game's creator John Newcomer.

» [Arcade] Williams' all-time classic *Defender* was the jewel in the crown of the early collections.

» [PC] As a bare minimum, each coin-op game would feature original artwork and history/trivia files, plus configurable options.

» [Arcade] On the PlayStation, *Super Sprint* supported three players – providing you had access to a Multitap.

Newcomer and RJ Mical discussed the making of their games. In fact, it's one of these tiny, grainy video clips that really highlights what Digital Eclipse achieved at the time. Speaking about the original Mac releases, *Defender* and *Robotron: 2084* co-creator Larry DeMar said, "When I first saw the Digital Eclipse programs my mind was blown. All of a sudden the carpet sweep of the memory test appeared and I was like, 'Oh my god you guys wrote a simulator!' The games themselves, when they were done, were such a struggle against what could technically be done… if someone had told me in 1982 that in 1995 I'd be sitting at my computer, playing on a machine that's simulating *my exact work*, I would have wondered what the guy was smoking." The fact that one of the actual creators was staggered that they could play these old games perfectly is testament to Digital Eclipse's groundbreaking emulation work.

Despite these achievements, the company didn't start out as a game developer. Founded in 1992 by Andrew Ayre, Hans Kim, John Neil and Howard Fukuda, Digital Eclipse was another California tech startup. "Well there was actually some game DNA in our blood," admits Andrew. "My father was an investor in a games arcade in the Eighties and I had worked there during the summers. Also, Hans and John had come out of the early Mac hobbyist scene. This was the time when Apple was migrating away from the 68000 and working on the PowerPC. It was from the 68000 emulation efforts for that migration that we heard about the Motorola 6809 emulation for Macs. All the early Williams coin-op games were built on their 6809 platform, so what better way to have fun with assembly level programming than to get *Stargate* running on a Mac?"

Andrew recalls the initial meeting when they demoed their work to Williams (the very

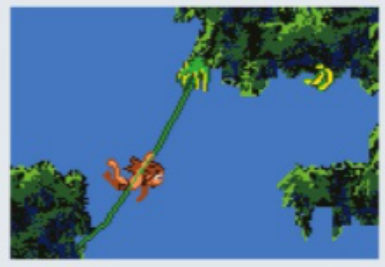
> "What better way to have fun with assembly level programming than to get Stargate running on a Mac?"
> **Andrew Ayre**

SELECTED TIMELINE

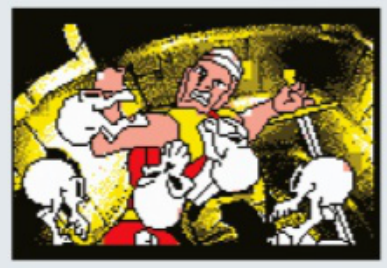
1994
THE DIGITAL ARCADE
Mac, PC
■ A pack featuring perfect emulations of three timeless classics from Williams: *Joust*, *Defender* and *Robotron: 2084* (pictured).

1995
ACTIVISION'S C64 15 PACK
PC
■ A rare computer-game collection, containing a bunch of C64 hits including *Toy Bizarre*, *Decathlon* and *Park Patrol* (pictured).

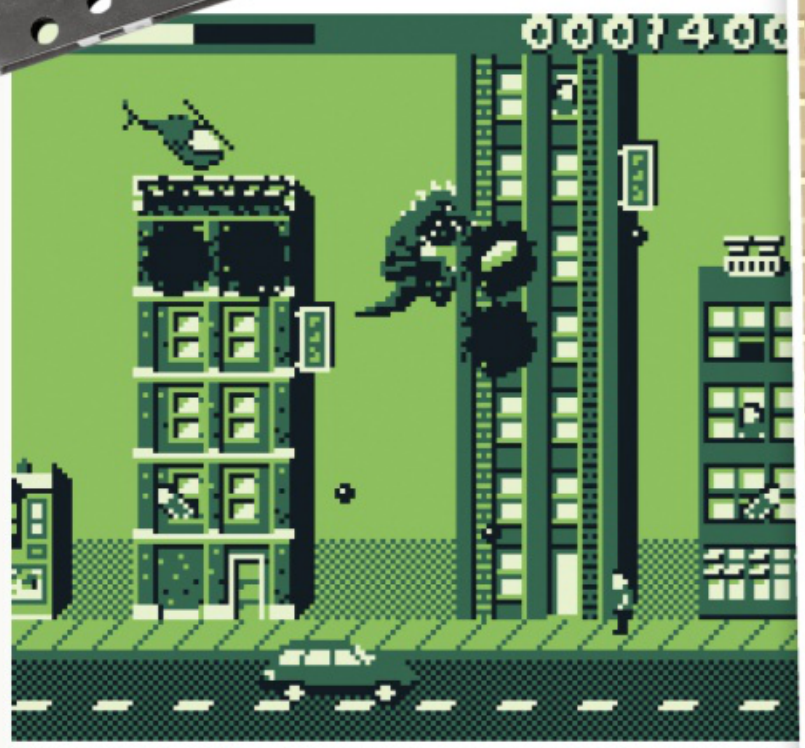
1998
THE ATARI COLLECTION 2
PlayStation, PC
■ *Paperboy*, *Gauntlet* and *Marble Madness* on one disc, plus three other coin-op classics. Surpasses the original *Atari Collection*.



1999
DISNEY'S TARZAN
Game Boy Color
■ A delightful Disney platformer for the GBC that reportedly sold more copies than the PlayStation and N64 versions combined.



2000
DRAGON'S LAIR
Game Boy Color
■ The LaserDisc classic, somehow crunched to fit on the GBC and managing to retain its sense of wonder.



» [Game Boy] *Rampage World Tour* was initially designed to run on the original Game Boy hardware, then quickly enhanced for the newly announced Game Boy Color.

» [GBA] The beautiful-looking *Season Of Ice* was one of three isometric *Spyro* games that the company created for the Game Boy Advance.

same meeting that Larry DeMar recounts in the video clip). "We hadn't even told them we were emulating the games, just that we wanted to license them. We simply reached out and harassed and cajoled somebody there to get us a licensing meeting at their headquarters in Chicago. So we schlepped out there lugging some kind of Mac dev hardware to show off the prototype. As soon as we fired *Stargate* up, Larry DeMar jumped up and immediately got Eugene Jarvis on the phone to come take a look. They were pretty happy about the whole thing and it alleviated any concerns about shitty ports of their games and paved the way to the licensing deal."

With the deal in place, Digital Eclipse planned to manufacture and publish the games itself and started looking for a distribution partner. Then in 1994 big business suddenly got in the way. "Williams acquired Tradewest, run by Byron Cook," says Andrew. "Our deal was already done and Byron inherited it, but the deal didn't fit into his plans. He was tasked with bringing all Williams' IP to the home market and these great legacy IPs were part of the plan. He told me the deal was off. That was pretty much all we had at the time, and we argued and fought it. He offered us the dev rights for the Mac and PC with a decent royalty and additional rights to develop for a new console from Sony. Well, at this time, Sony had never made a console or shipped a videogame as far as I knew so what was the point? So we got our lawyer involved and then things got a lot worse. I spoke to Activision's Bobby Kotick about the problem and he offered to speak to Byron, as they were friends. 'You're in the right,' Bobby told me, 'but Byron is pissed off as hell. You've got to take the deal, but it's the last deal you'll ever do with Byron.' Anyway, that was the first of probably 50 deals we did with Byron and Williams/Midway/Atari. It was without a doubt the deal that launched Digital Eclipse."

> "While we thought the extras were important, it was always a debate with our publishing partners who didn't want to pay for them"
> **Mike Mika**

The deals kept coming because there was a clear appetite for retro collections. Mike Mika, who joined the business in 1998 as a technical director, remembers those heady days well. "The collections were far more successful than we or anyone else anticipated. Soon we had requests from companies with large back catalogues who realised they were sitting on a lot of potential, dormant revenue. Because they could be produced relatively cheaply, they became a regular business for us. Publishers often told us that sales of our work funded a lot of their big titles being produced at the time. One publisher even told us we saved their quarter,

2002
DISNEY'S LILO & STITCH
Game Boy Advance
■ A Disney game that has more in common with *Metal Slug* than Mickey Mouse. An overlooked gem.

2004
GRAND THEFT AUTO ADVANCE
Game Boy Advance
■ Another portable title that surpasses expectations. A prequel to *GTA III*, adopting the top-down style of the original games.

2005
DEATH JR
PlayStation Portable
■ A 3D hack-and-slash that was the first title to demonstrate the potential of Sony's new PSP handheld.

2006
SEGA MEGA DRIVE COLLECTION
PS2, PlayStation Portable
■ A solid 28-game collection that balances expected titles (*Altered Beast* and *Sonic The Hedgehog*) with some nice surprises like *Ecco Jr.*

2007
CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
Xbox 360
■ One of the greatest games ever, ported to XBLA (and the first to laugh in the face of the 50MB file size limit).

» [GBC] Digital Eclipse converted *1942* to the Game Boy Colour in 2000.

» This racing spin-off and its sequel were developed exclusively for the PSP, under the supervision of Sega.

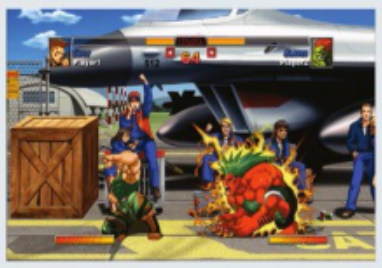
» Who would have thought there was a run-'n-gun platformer lurking inside this box?

» [Game Boy Color] When Mike says that some of the early Game Boy titles were "not our best work", he probably has *Mortal Kombat 4* in mind.

then proceeded to negotiate a smaller budget with us. You can't make this stuff up!"

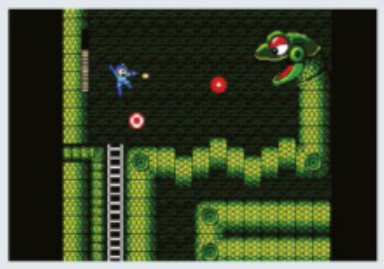
Mike also reveals that some publishers didn't want to stump up for the video interviews and other extras that gaming fans craved. "While we thought the extras were important, it was always a debate with our publishing partners who didn't want to pay for them. At the time there was very little information about how the games were created, who created them, and what it was like behind the scenes. Chris Charla, a game journalist friend, helped produce the videos that were in those early collections. For many people, those videos were the first time that anyone had ever seen the people responsible for those games. It was a fascinating look behind the curtain."

Mike's arrival coincided with the business branching out and producing titles for Nintendo's Game Boy line. This proved to be something of a natural progression for those involved. "We learned from the greatest engineers of gaming's past, so when it came to Nintendo's handheld platforms, which were designed with older architecture in mind for cost reasons, it put them squarely into our area of expertise. Midway was the first to ask us to produce games for the original Game Boy and I remember being told, 'Don't worry, we don't expect these to do more than a modest amount of sales, the platform is almost dead.' Then Nintendo announced the Game Boy Color and interest in the Game Boy blew up. We were then asked to add colour without getting any extra time so we basically



2008
SUPER STREET FIGHTER II TURBO HD REMIX
Xbox 360, PS3
■ A lavish update of *SSFII Turbo*, featuring high-definition visuals, remixed music and online versus play.

2008
SUPER MONKEY BALL
iOS
■ In the early days of iPhone gaming this popular conversion made good use of the device's touch screen and tilt controls.



2015
MEGA MAN LEGACY COLLECTION
PC, Various
■ Brings together the six NES games and adds in a new Challenge mode plus loads of lovely development assets.

2018
SNK 40TH ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION
PC, Various
■ What SNK did before the Neo Geo. Includes *Athena* and *POW: Prisoners Of War* (pictured).

2022
ATARI 50
PC, Various
■ This upcoming collection includes 90 Atari coin-op and console titles, plus updates like *Yars' Revenge Reimagined* (pictured).

» Celebrating the cult Japanese developer's 40th anniversary, this impressive collection contains 24 arcade games released between 1979 and 1990.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW

MOVEMENTS OF THE KEY PLAYERS

ANDREW AYRE

■ Harvard graduate Andrew cofounded Digital Eclipse in 1992 and has remained involved ever since, through senior roles at Backbone Entertainment and Foundation 9, and subsequently as CEO of Other Ocean Group which he established in 2006. These days Other Ocean operates several studios in the US and Canada, and since 2015 has been the home of Digital Eclipse.

MIKE MIKA

■ Mike left behind games journalism to join Digital Eclipse in 1998, where he developed many handheld titles for the Game Boy line. He then headed up various studies and has had a hand in more than 100 games. More recently he was responsible for the 2015 hit #IDARB and the arcade mod *Donkey Kong – Pauline Edition* (Google it). He's currently president of Digital Eclipse.

JEFF VAVASOUR

■ Jeff was one of Digital Eclipse's technical experts, earning 'hardware guru' credits on many of its early coin-op collections. During the Backbone years he ran its Vancouver studio which developed 40+ titles including the *Sonic Rivals* games. He left the business in 2006 and founded his own studio Code Mystics in 2009, which has provided emulation and porting services to the likes of Atari, SNK and Arcade1Up.

▶ ripped the games apart. It was not our best work, but that didn't matter. They sold like hot cakes and from that point on we strived to never let quality take a back seat. As we were one of only a few Game Boy developers a lot of opportunities started to come our way. We were enlisted to port older games, then port newer titles, then create original designs for companies like Disney, Activision and Electronic Arts."

> "There was a stigma about movie games back then. 'Shit in a box' was the phrase you'd hear a lot"
> **Mike Mika**

Digital Eclipse remains best known for its game preservation work, but it would go on to produce dozens of licensed titles for Nintendo handhelds. For Mike and the team this was far from a necessary evil. "We loved doing those titles," he says, smiling. "There was a stigma about movie games back then. 'Shit in a box,' was the phrase you'd hear a lot. *Disney's Tarzan* was a fun title to do as it was an opportunity to make a throwback game reminiscent of the Disney/Virgin titles like *Aladdin*. What made these so fun is that we could do anything. Publishers didn't want to think about handheld games, they put all their focus on the cutting-edge platforms. That meant we could really explore dumb ideas. For instance, we made *Lilo & Stitch* a homage to *Metal Slug*. It's a really beautiful game. I love when people discover these games for the first time and reach out, usually to say, 'How the heck did you get away with that?'"

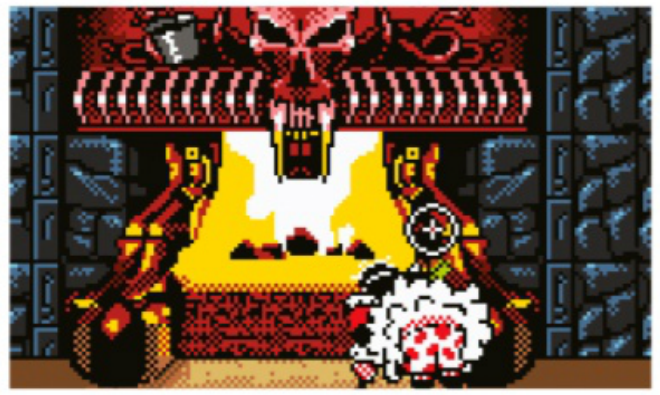
While continuing to handle high-profile licensed titles such as *Grand Theft Auto Advance* and develop original projects like *Death Jr* for the Sony PSP (both tales for another time), the arrival of the Xbox Live Arcade digital download service on the Xbox 360 provided Digital Eclipse with an opportunity to return to its roots. XBLA launched with a 50MB file size limit, which was perfect for retro coin-op and console games, so over the next four years the firm flooded the service with individual releases from Sega, Konami and of course Williams. "At one point I think we were responsible for 25% of the console's entire digital download catalogue," says Mike. "We were very bullish about getting games into the digital marketplace and it really paid off for us. Many developers and publishers didn't think digital games were all that interesting. We thought it was a perfect place for the sort of games we produced."

» Original design documents included within *Street Fighter 30th Anniversary Collection* reveal the origins of the Shoryuken.

DNA OF DIGITAL ECLIPSE

RETRO COLLECTIONS

■ Digital Eclipse shipped the first commercial emulation of any coin-op in 1994 and over the years has released dozens of retro-game collections for numerous formats, working with significant IP holders like Sega, Capcom and Konami. These collections remain its bread and butter.



FILM AND TV TIE-INS

■ In the early Noughties the firm enjoyed a profitable sideline developing licences for Nintendo handhelds. "We did a game based on the Adam Sandler film *Little Nicky*," says Mike. "Nobody bothered to get approvals or anything. There's stuff in there that really shouldn't be there!"

» [PS4] *Samurai Shodown Neo Geo Collection* includes the previously unreleased *Samurai Shodown V Perfect*.

It was during this productive period that a relationship was forged with Capcom, which entrusted the company with some of its biggest properties. "Capcom wanted to dip its toe into the digital download space – it's so weird to use that old-timey phrase now – but at that time it had no plans to revisit its old games. So we dreamed big. We thought, why not try to modernise them, remaster them with new art, and for *Commando* and *1942*, let's make sequels. Capcom was great. It was insane and it was stressful, but we were testing the waters of what modern day Digital Eclipse would eventually become. We've worked a lot with Capcom since and all that work led to things like the *Mega Man Legacy Collection* and the *Street Fighter 30th Anniversary Collection*."

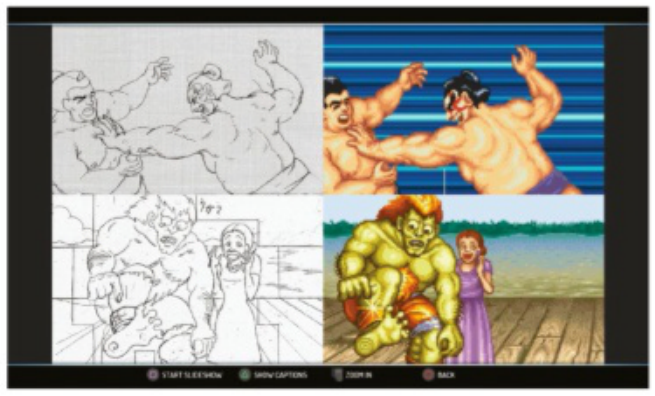
As Mike mentions these more recent successes, he's keen to point out that the journey to get there hasn't always been plain sailing. "As the industry expanded, we needed to expand too," he says. In 2003, Digital Eclipse merged with ImaginEngine to become Backbone Entertainment. Then in 2005 Backbone merged with The Collective to form Foundation 9 Entertainment, one of the world's largest independent game developers. Such rapid change predictably had an effect on the working atmosphere and culture, even though Digital Eclipse remained a brand within the bigger business. "It didn't change much at first," says Mike, "but eventually we became very focussed on earnings and there was a lot of stress about what projects went where. I think everyone started to feel claustrophobic and the old ways of pursuing crazy ideas began to be sorely missed. Even when you were profitable it didn't mean you could automatically reinvest that profit in your projects. It had to be fought for amongst other studio needs. It was not a fun time."

In 2007, Andrew departed Foundation 9 and bought out Backbone's studio in Charlottetown, Canada. He renamed it Other Ocean Interactive and was soon joined by Mike and other Digital Eclipse colleagues. Then in 2015 Digital Eclipse was reborn as a brand dedicated to classic game restorations and remakes. "Andrew had an opportunity to acquire the name and some assets from Foundation 9, so he took it," says Mike. "Partly out of nostalgia, but also because we felt there was so much value still left there." Since the relaunch, the Digital Eclipse name has graced a number of highly regarded retro collections and later this year it will release *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: The Cowabunga Collection* and *Atari 50: The Anniversary Collection* (more info on page six). Despite the acclaim, Mike is mindful that the studio approaches each release with the appropriate level of care and attention. "We only succeed when we deliver on what the community wants. What we provide is an in-depth experience with your favourite games that gives you things you've never seen before – extra content and even unreleased sequels like *Samurai Shodown V Perfect*. Everything we do is a love letter to the games we showcase, and if we treat them with the respect they deserve, we'll hopefully build an audience that appreciates these games as much as we do."

So in the year we celebrate 50 years of Atari, let's also raise a glass to Digital Eclipse to toast 30 years of preserving the pastime we love and the videogames we treasure. ✱

EMULATION ACCURACY

■ While its retro releases offer modern features like load/save and rewind, you can still play the games just as they were back in the day. Various filters and presentation options are also included for those looking to simulate the display tech of the time. And who doesn't love a good scanline?



VIDEOGAME HISTORY

■ Taking its cue from the extras you'd find on LaserDisc movies of the era, Digital Eclipse included video interviews and other cool extras on its early collections. This has continued to this day, with a wealth of fascinating design documents unearthed and included on its releases.

CROWDFUNDING AND COMMUNITY

■ Last year the company invited interested parties to invest in its future plans and share in its financial success. Its community endeavours were highlighted in 2020 when it invited gamers to submit ideas for a new Xbox title based on the movie *Space Jam: A New Legacy* (pictured).

6
2,800
MONEY
SECURITY
MODE

One Piece Mansion

HIGH RISE, HIGH STAKES

» PLAYSTATION » 2000 » CAPCOM

The block of flats I live in is a bit weird. I used to live next to a family with three kids, but now they've moved out, the flat is just as quiet as it was when they were there. On the other hand, I can hear every footstep coming from the flat above me, a fact that has ensured that I never bust out the dance mats – after all, I have no desire to annoy my downstairs neighbour. Not everybody is so considerate though, as Capcom's *One Piece Mansion* reminds me.

It's a very cool action puzzle game in which you're put in charge of a block of flats, with different goals to reach – for example, making a certain amount of money or building a certain number of floors. Each of your tenants will either stress or soothe their neighbours, depending on their behaviour. The sumo wrestler will pound away at his walls, annoying those next to him, while a couple in love will send floating hearts to relieve the flat above. If a tenant becomes too stressed, their room will explode – but that's useful to know for when the evil Syndicate 5 goons move in and start harassing the good tenants. Every so often, you need to leave the management room to chase them back to their rooms, and by moving tenants around you can stress them out of the building.

It's a game I'd wanted to own for years, especially after missing a copy in a charity shop once, but it has the kind of cult classic appeal that made me assume that it was expensive. It turns out I was mistaken – the game can routinely be had for £10 or less, as I discovered when I happened across a copy at the Hyper Japan festival recently. ✱

THE MAKING OF BIOSHOCK™

BUILT ON THE IDEAS OF EARLY IMMERSIVE SIMS, BIOSHOCK WAS AN ATTEMPT TO MAKE SOMETHING IN THE NICHE PC GENRE THAT COULD APPEAL TO A BROADER AUDIENCE. WOULD YOU KINDLY READ ON TO FIND OUT HOW IRRATIONAL GAMES MADE ONE OF THE INDUSTRY'S MOST MEMORABLE HITS?

WORDS BY ADAM BARNES

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** 2K GAMES
- **DEVELOPER:** IRRATIONAL GAMES
- **RELEASED:** 2007
- **PLATFORM:** PC, VARIOUS
- **GENRE:** FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

Let's address that elephant in the room. We know what you're thinking: *BioShock isn't a retro game*. It's a fair standpoint, but the underwater FPS is celebrating its 15th anniversary this month, which falls within our own remit, and regardless, no one can discount its status as an utter classic. And the fact is, when it comes to selecting games from the pile of 'recently retro' to cover, only the very best, most innovative, most impactful games can make the cut… and that basically defines *BioShock*. But what's interesting about the game's development is how so much of its essence is owed to a much older, equally beloved release.

"We didn't think we were done with some of the ideas that we worked with on *System Shock 2* and we wanted to keep working in that genre," says Jonathan Chey. Many will know Jon as one of the cofounders of Irrational Games, and he was the director of development on the game. "We didn't feel that anyone had picked up on those ideas. At least for the next few years after it had been released, there wasn't a flood of *System Shock 2* clones on the market because it hadn't been a huge hit. So we didn't feel like that space had really still been explored. We felt that it deserved to be more popular than it was." This was actually one of the driving forces behind the creation of *BioShock*, the team's desire to create something *like System Shock 2*, but something that could have a much broader appeal. "We recognised that there were things in *System Shock 2* that were holding it back, that were excessively complicated, that were opaque or hard for people to understand or that they simply didn't like." Jon lists fiddly controls, excessive menu navigation and a reliance on mouse and keyboard input as just some of the things that needed fixing if they wanted *BioShock* to become mainstream.

Irrational Games often pitched itself as a design-led studio, and that it intended to focus first on the mechanisms of the game rather than any storyline element. At the very start of it all, ahead of any real plan or prototyping, was a gameplay system that many might recognise. Essentially it boiled down to three archetypes of NPCs: drones, protectors and harvesters. This equated to characters in the game that would transport something valuable, protectors that would help them do it, and the latter that would seek to relinquish this resource for themselves. "The original idea for the Little Sisters was a mechanical one," explains Jon, "which was that there would be creatures who were essentially mobile treasure chests and they would be guarded by other creatures. The mobile treasure chest would walk around the level doing something, and there would be something else

» [PC] It all starts with a plane crash and an ominous lighthouse in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean…

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SYSTEM SHOCK 2
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1999

TRIBES: VENGEANCE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 2004

SWAT 4
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 2005

REMASTERING BIOSHOCK

UPDATING THE CLASSIC FOR A NEW GENERATION

As an Xbox 360 game over the age of ten, *BioShock* is obviously a prime candidate to receive the remaster treatment. As usual, the purpose here is full HD resolution, improved framerates (60fps) and general texture and lighting upgrades. While there are some areas that this has improved the game – particularly with detailing in the textures and enhanced visual effects – the switch does mean that some of that Xbox 360 haziness is lost. Our impression of *BioShock* in our minds' eyes is it being dark, claustrophobic and foreboding, and without that of-the-era fuzz on the graphics, some of that feeling is dispersed in switching to the new visuals.

But it is available as part of a complete package, which means players can run through the whole story – which needs to include the *Burial At Sea* DLC – and enjoy the finality of a well-loved series.

There is also the addition of a director's commentary featuring Ken Levine, which is interesting for players of the original not only because of the added insight from Ken and the game's lead artist Shawn Robertson, but also because this is unlocked through collectibles in the world – an added incentive to fully explore the worlds of *BioShock*.

> "WE RECOGNISED THAT THERE WERE THINGS IN SYSTEM SHOCK 2 THAT WERE HOLDING IT BACK"
> JONATHAN CHEY

BEYOND BIOSHOCK

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER RAPTURE?

CHALLENGE ROOMS

Let's not forget that while *BioShock* might still feel like a modern title, it released before a lot of the familiar tropes of the modern gaming industry – including DLC. The Challenge Rooms for the original game were the best attempt at adding more content to the game, but were just a series of tests for the player.

BIOSHOCK 2

Releasing a sequel to *BioShock* was always going to be tough, and sure enough the response to the second game was mixed. Some felt it was too similar, others felt that it didn't touch on what made the original great. But in hindsight, it did go on to become a well-loved addition to the series.

MINERVA'S DEN

Learning its lesson the second time around, this DLC for *BioShock 2* smartly focussed on a more narrative-driven approach to new content. It had a more open-world style to its story, which is very interesting considering it wasn't a feature that any of the full-release games had achieved well.

BIOSHOCK INFINITE

This was a controversial release due to the game's heavy reliance on full frontal combat rather than the slow, methodical approach of the original. However, the storyline remained an important aspect and its mind-blowing twist at the end of the game rewarded players that were hoping for another 'Would you kindly?' moment.

> "IN GENERAL GAMES WERE JUST GETTING EASIER AND EASIER TO DEVELOP"
> JONATHAN CHEY

watching over them. But what those things were wasn't established for quite a long time." The idea was to create systems that worked together to create something that seemed real and believable, as though the world of the game would trundle along with or without the player. "So that's where the Little Sisters, the Big Daddies and the Splicers come from," explains Jon. "We had some monsters that weren't just about how they fight you, what's interesting about them is that they interact with each other and there are different ways that you can interact with them that isn't just about what the best angle to shoot them from is."

It was quite some time before they took on the iconic look of a possessed schoolgirl and her accompanying boring drill with legs, however, which organically evolved as development of the story progressed. "Originally the Little Sisters were called Gatherers, and they went through a number of iterations," Jon says. "At one stage they were like slugs that crawled around sucking things out of corpses, there was a whole range. It was a long time before they were the little girls we ended up with."

This was true of the final setting of the game, as well, which was originally built around something fairly akin to *System Shock*. Aboard a space station, the player would battle against genetically modified mutants while rescuing other characters from cults all bundled into a dark story covering political topics. The team ultimately turned its back on the concept, and so Ken Levine – the reputed writer of *BioShock* – came up with something else.

"It was set on an island after the Second World War," recalls Jon of what would be the foundation for *BioShock*'s story. "It was a secret Nazi base that had been set up during the war. It had been abandoned and now it's full of crazy Nazis and the results of their crazy experiments. It obviously had some things in common, you can see how he got from there to the underwater Ayn Randian fantasy paradise gone bad. It changed a lot along the way, obviously." As we know, the final thematic change came along, in part thanks to 2K Games buying out Irrational Games and giving the studio free rein to create any game story it wanted so long as the core Little Sister/Big Daddy game mechanic was kept intact. It wasn't until Ken took a trip to the Rockefeller Center, witnessed its art deco aesthetic and learnt of the troubles the construction of the building faced that he was inspired to come up with the concept of Rapture and of its creator, Andrew Ryan – the game's infamous antagonist and whose name is, in fact, a play on the author Ayn Rand's name whose philosophical values of Obstructivism became core to the game's narrative. Is a man not entitled to the sweat of his brow, and all that.

And in fact, this time around there was a much bigger focus on narrative and on telling a richer and deeper story than was the case with its spiritual successor of *System Shock 2*. "In general games were just getting easier and easier to develop," says Jon about the gap between the two *Shock* games. "For *BioShock* we were now using the Unreal

CLASH IN THE CLOUDS

Now the timeline has caught up with the salacious nature of the modern day games industry, with this throwaway combat-focussed DLC pack released only months after the base *BioShock Infinite* game was released. Sure it gave space for players to enjoy the combat, but that wasn't why anyone bought *Infinite*.

BURIAL AT SEA: PART 1

The story-led DLC pack for the third game was an exciting one, returning players to Rapture not as Jack but rather as Booker, the main character from *Infinite*. Split into two parts, the first provided some additional insight into the game's world – and Booker – after learning the twist in *Infinite*.

BURIAL AT SEA: PART 2

The second part of the expansion pack has players embody Elizabeth, the game-long escort quest from *Infinite*. It's a crucial part of the entire series' storyline, however, and brings everything full circle in a neat and final way. Definitely not to miss if you're a series fan.

Engine, but in *System Shock 2* we were using the Thief Engine. I think we were the only other project that used it, so you can't really say it was an engine." The switch to Unreal was advantageous because Irrational had experience with the engine already having used it when developing *SWAT 4* and *Tribes*. "So we had a lot of advantages in terms of knowing how to do things," adds Jon, "so that allowed us to spend less time doing basic things and more time doing more complicated things, particularly on the narrative and scripting side of things. Which I think, after *Half-Life*, every first-person shooter had to start doing." By comparison, *BioShock* had considerably more scripted moments dedicated to narrative than any of *System Shock 2*, which Jon suggests, "Really only has a couple of those [scripted moments] and they're a bit ropey. They're well-written and stuff, but in terms of their animation and the way that they're delivered, they're a little laughable now."

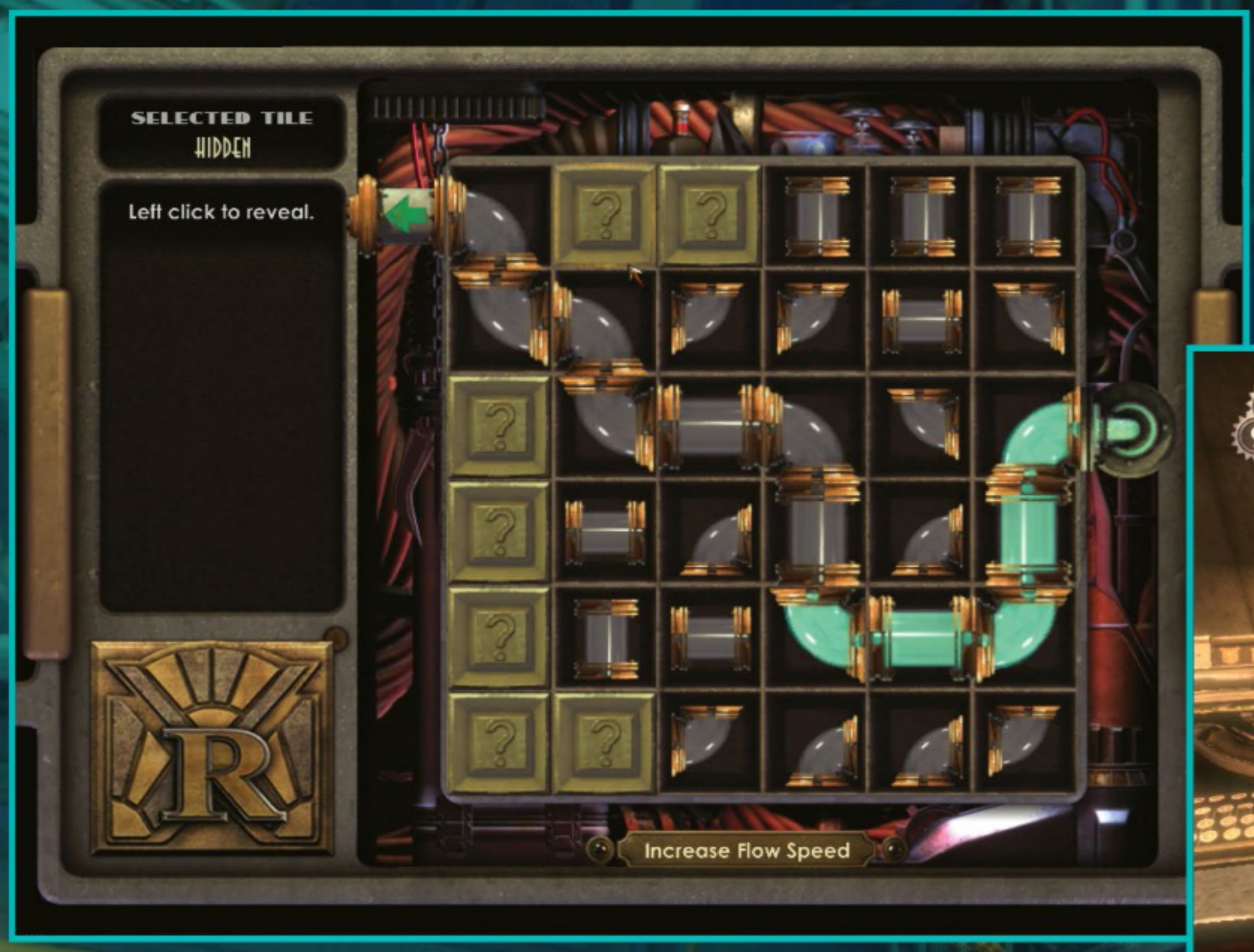
And by focussing on a console release as a priority, Irrational Games was able to address the concern that *System Shock 2* had been too fiddly, too menu-driven and too complicated. This wasn't just about introducing features to players in a more effective manner, but also in simplifying and minimising the interactions the player did outside of the gameplay. That's where the idea for the feature-specific vending machines came about, allowing players to interact with a mechanic within the world rather than toiling away looking for the necessary option within a series of menus. The Gatherer's Garden is used for getting ability upgrades, the Gene Bank was for customising your ability loadouts, Power To The People

» [PC] A lot of *BioShock*'s more memorable moments simply come from its creepy scripted events like this one.

» [PC] Stepping into a fallen utopia and discovering its tumultuous history is a fascinating journey.

» [PC] Little Sisters and Big Daddies, name a more iconic duo. Irrational did a fantastic job of setting up the Daddies as a major threat to the player.

» [PC] Environmental storytelling is a fairly new concept in the grand scope of the industry, but *BioShock* did a bang-up job of it before it was commonplace.



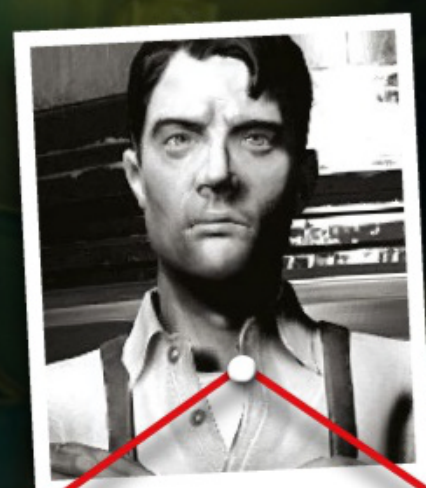
» [PC] Later games in the series thankfully dropped the arduous *Pipemania*-like hacking minigame that you had to endure endlessly.

WHO'S WHO UNDER THE SEA?

THE KEY CHARACTERS OF RAPTURE

ANDREW RYAN

■ The main man of Rapture, its creator and the embodiment of philosophical Obstructivism that had been crucial to his design by Ken Levine. Andrew Ryan doesn't actually appear for very long in the game, what with him being hunkered down in his safe house after the fall of Rapture, but you'll see his image, hear his voice and learn of his ideologies throughout the game.

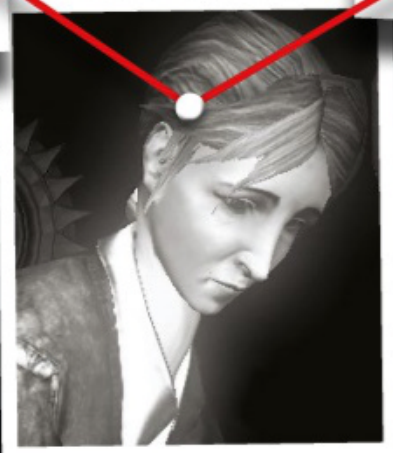


ATLAS

■ Known as the Liberator Of Rapture, it was Atlas that led the disgruntled masses against Andrew Ryan that started the Civil War and ultimately the downfall of the underwater city. He also very politely asks the player character, Jack, if he would kindly embark on a number of tasks throughout the game, and is a major character in unravelling *BioShock*'s story.

BRIGID TENEBAUM

■ A geneticist who discovers many of Rapture's scientific advancements, such as the discovery of ADAM and its gene-altering capabilities. She's also the creator of the Little Sisters and how you treat them affects her willingness to help you.



YI SUCHONG

■ Without the restrictions of morality, Suchong found he could be the best scientist he had always wanted to be. His field focussed primarily on altering the human mind, and through that he was able to form the minds of the Little Sisters and their connection to Big Daddies. He's also tied to the story of *BioShock Infinite*.

SANDER COHEN

■ Cohen is a prominent character within the thriving art scene of Rapture, but when the city descends into madness with death around every corner, he goes mad. It's in Fort Frolic that the player must suffer his addled mind in one of *BioShock*'s most memorable levels.

> "BIOSHOCK IS A FANTASTIC GAME BUT THE GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT IS THAT IT PROVED THAT THERE WAS A MARKET FOR THAT KIND OF GAME"
> JONATHAN CHEY

» [PC] *BioShock* helped pioneer the collectible audio log that narrated lore without pausing the gameplay. Outstanding at the time, but we're sick of it now.

» [PC] The Sander Cohen level is perhaps its most memorable for reverting *BioShock* back to its creepy, survival horror mood at the mid-point of the game.

» [PC] The latter part of the game is known for losing a lot of what made *BioShock* great. Lessons learned for later games.

▶ for enhancing your weapons and of course the memorable Circus Of Values was for stocking up on essential items. Perhaps it sounds more convoluted than a menu and its various sub-menus, but having each feature siphoned away to its own machine meant that not only were players engaged with the world of Rapture while even considering meta-game facets like character upgrades but that everything was so much more accessible than the mouse-and-keyboard play of PC RPGs.

"The Psy system from *System Shock* we thought was underutilised," adds Jon. "It was cool, but it wasn't as essential to the game as we had wanted it to be." This was why the Plasmid system became so important to both the narrative and the gameplay of *BioShock*, because Irrational had felt that it was too easy to overlook the cool mechanic within *System Shock 2* which had been designed to allow for multiple replays with completely different styles of playing. "We thought this was kind of a waste, because most people don't finish a game once, let alone three times. We wanted to expose players to these systems a bit more uniformly, so the Plasmid system in *BioShock* is more central to the game than the Psy system was in *System Shock 2*." It helped that the experience of creating the Psy System also meant that the team knew what to weed out when it came to powers and abilities in *BioShock*, too. "It's a better design. I mean the Psy powers in *System Shock 2*, there are a few useful ones but there are a lot of them that are not that useful," explains Jon. "Whereas the Plasmid System was designed with the benefit of having already built a system like that once, we could make sure those powers were more generally useful."

Throughout development, Irrational always held *System Shock 2* up as a foundational goal, and with the financial backing of 2K Games giving the developer more scope to improve on absolutely every single aspect, it nailed it. "In my mind, what I had hoped *BioShock* would achieve was bringing a lot of those gameplay systems [from *System Shock 2*] to a larger audience. Ken obviously had a lot of narrative ideas that were important for him in the game, and I think he succeeded wildly with those too." And succeed the studio did. *BioShock* released in August 2007 on PC and as a console exclusive on Xbox 360 and was a huge success. Critics and players alike praised its narrative themes, RPG-infused gameplay and its iconic visuals, and it went on to win numerous Game Of The Year awards and quickly became a multi-million selling franchise. That doesn't mean that there weren't faults

» [PC] The loose moral ambiguity around the Little Sisters was crowbarred in due to 2K Games' concern around attacking little girls.

with the game, however, with some being more notorious than others. "The boss fight is not our highest point in development," admits Jon of how the latter part of *BioShock* kind of veers off-kilter. "I think we always found it hard to do endings. We knew we needed something at the end to wrap it all up. And I actually think this is true for *System Shock 2* as well, I think the end of the game is the worst part of it. And part of the reason is that the end of the game has a lot of pressure to make it cool, and do some special things, and there needs to be a boss fight and there needs to be a totally new environment and you've kind of got to do all of this special case stuff."

Jon adds that in a need to add some finality to the game, things "kind of get dumbed down" and that hit *BioShock* hard simply for the originality and engagement of everything that came before. Despite that, no one really remembers those final moments of *BioShock*, which says a lot of just how stellar the rest of the experience is. It was a combination of everything: engrossing gameplay with freedom of choice; a rich and unique world to explore; and a truly unique art direction for a videogame. "To me, *BioShock* is a fantastic game but the greatest achievement is that it proved that there was a market for that kind of game." says Jon. "I guess it created that market really. I think *BioShock*, compared to *System Shock 2* and *Deus Ex* and *Thief* and *Ultima Underworld* and all the other games that we or Looking Glass and Warren Spector had made in that genre, *BioShock* was the first one that was a multi-million seller. After that, publishers were interested in that kind of game, and obviously 2K wanted to do more of it. I'm pretty sure it helped with things like the *Deus Ex* sequels, I think it helped influence a whole bunch of other games in that genre." It definitely did open up players to the idea that FPS games could be smarter, deeper and engaging beyond pointing the crosshairs at a Nazi's head. "I couldn't be happier with *BioShock*," says Jon. "It's definitely one of the things I'm most proud of in my game-development career. ✱

Hardware Heaven

N-Gage QD fact

■ Though the N-Gage QD was released in a variety of colour schemes, the Silver Edition differs from most as the 5 and 7 keys were not raised for ease of gaming use.

PROCESSOR: 32-BIT ARM920T CPU (104 MHZ)

GRAPHICS: 176X208 DISPLAY, UP TO 4096 COLOURS ON SCREEN, SOFTWARE 3D RENDERING

NETWORKING: GPRS MOBILE INTERNET CONNECTION, BLUETOOTH

AUDIO: MONOPHONIC, POLYPHONIC AND WAV SOUNDS SUPPORTED

STORAGE: 16MB INTERNAL MEMORY (3.4MB AVAILABLE TO USER), EXPANDABLE VIA MMC CARD

OPERATING SYSTEM: NOKIA SYMBIAN 6.1

MEDIA: MMC CARD (UP TO 2GB)

RAM: 16MB SDRAM

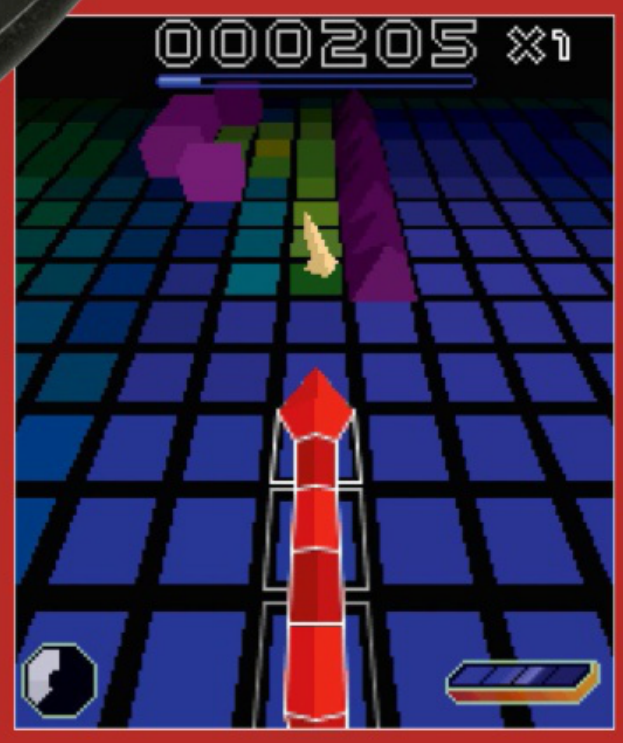
SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

N-Gage QD

» MANUFACTURER: Nokia **» YEAR:** 2004
» COST: £149.99 (launch), £120+ (today, boxed, unlocked), £50+ (today, unboxed, unlocked)

In 2003, Nokia had posed a simple question to consumers – why carry a handheld console and a mobile phone when the N-Gage could serve as both? For many, the answer was that it was inferior to dedicated devices in both functions, prompting Nokia to attempt to address the criticisms with a new model. The N-Gage QD featured an improved d-pad and a repositioned MMC card slot, allowing games to be changed without removing the battery. It also did away with the infamous 'sidetalking' arrangement, with a more conventional placement of the microphone and speaker.

Though the N-Gage QD was broadly considered to be an improvement over the original N-Gage, it wasn't a straight upgrade as some features were lost, including FM radio reception and MP3 playback. In any case, it was too late to rescue the platform. There were still long periods in which few or no games were released, and its 3D-gaming capability became markedly less impressive when the Nintendo DS and PlayStation Portable released later in 2004. The platform saw its final releases in the spring of 2006. ✱



ESSENTIAL GAME
Snakes

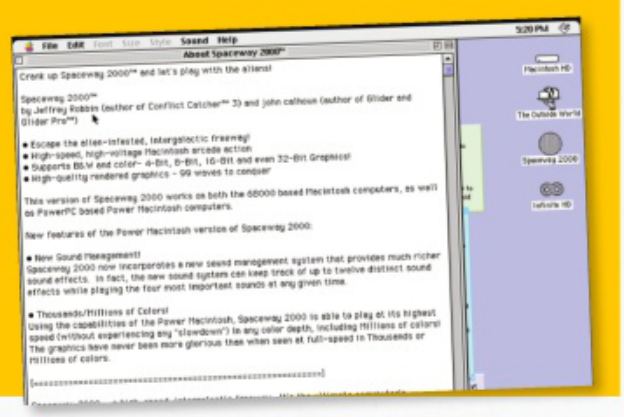
Whenever anybody talks about old Nokia phones, the built-in game *Snake* will inevitably receive a mention as a classic distraction. This modernised version brings the action into 3D, with 42 distinct stages that offer new features such as holes and tunnels, as well as hexagonal grids alongside the square ones. *Snakes* was originally offered as a free download from the game's official website, and could be transferred to other players via Bluetooth. In 2005, it was one of the most promising examples of what mobile gaming could become.

JOHN CALHOUN

The Macintosh had more games than people gave it credit for and among those developers gliding in to make their mark was John Calhoun thanks to a bunch of quirky, innovative titles that included an instant classic

Words by David Crookes

John Calhoun became a well-known name in Macintosh circles following the release of his acclaimed game, *Glider*, published as shareware in 1988. Forming his own company (Soft Dorothy Software – a nod to *The Wizard Of Oz* since he grew up in Kansas), John also created other innovative Mac titles. He struck a deal with publisher Casady & Greene and became a full-time games developer, too. By the mid-Nineties, however, he landed a job with Apple, before Steve Jobs returned and created a powerhouse of a company. Being employed by Apple effectively ended his gaming endeavours (except for a brief period when he produced iOS titles) but, now he's retired, he can be found blogging and working on projects at engineersneedart.com and he doesn't rule out a return.



Can you remember when you first became interested in computers?
A friend of the family had a TRS-80 and we were starting to see computers in the movies and in shows such as *Star Trek*. One of the games he had was *Trek-80*, programmed in BASIC, and it was the first time I'd seen a game running on a personal computer. I remember thinking, "Now that's really cool." I guess the idea of computers and games ignited something in me.

Did you then begin coding yourself?
My high school was progressive enough to have a computer-science class which I took in my junior year. Since this was 1980, the teacher told us to buy a stack of punch cards and said we were going to learn COBOL or Fortran or something like that. Then, a week or two later, half of the classroom had Apple II computers and the teacher said, "Forget the stack of punch cards, you're gonna have to buy two of these 5.25-inch floppy disks and we're gonna learn BASIC." That was my introduction to programming computers.

Were you fortunate enough to get a computer of your own?
Kids would hang out in the computer science room after school and the teacher was cool with that. He enjoyed seeing our enthusiasm to learn. Some of the wealthier kids had their own Apple IIs at home and they'd bring games into school – there was a lot of pirating going on. But my single mother didn't have near enough money to buy a computer so I'd just use the ones in high school, writing games in BASIC.

What games did you write?
I had a friend in high school who had a Commodore PET. We were into *Dungeons & Dragons* at the time and I'd go over to his house after school, and we'd write programs that would generate players or characters. I also remember a crude, almost *Asteroids*-like game that had been developed with scrolling ASCII. When we saw the game's source code, we spent a lot of time tweaking it, adding shields, extra lives and so on. It was fun taking an existing game and modifying it.

Did you have experience with any other machines?
My father lived in Alaska and I would go there during the summertime to visit and work in the salmon canneries because they would need lots of workers. I also spent time hanging out, playing on my father's VIC-20, originally, then a Commodore 64. I wrote a little *Tron*-type game with ASCII graphics before discovering Commodore's manual showed how to remap the character tables so you could basically do your own font, as long as each character was five by seven pixels.

When did you get your own computer?
In college, when I bought the Macintosh Plus, the first computer I owned. Well, I briefly had an Atari 400 but I kind of didn't think of it as a computer because it was more of a games machine. I guess it did have a BASIC cartridge but I didn't mess with it that much. I didn't have a floppy or cassette drive so there wasn't any way for me to store a program once I typed it in. It took the enthusiasm off doing anything interesting.

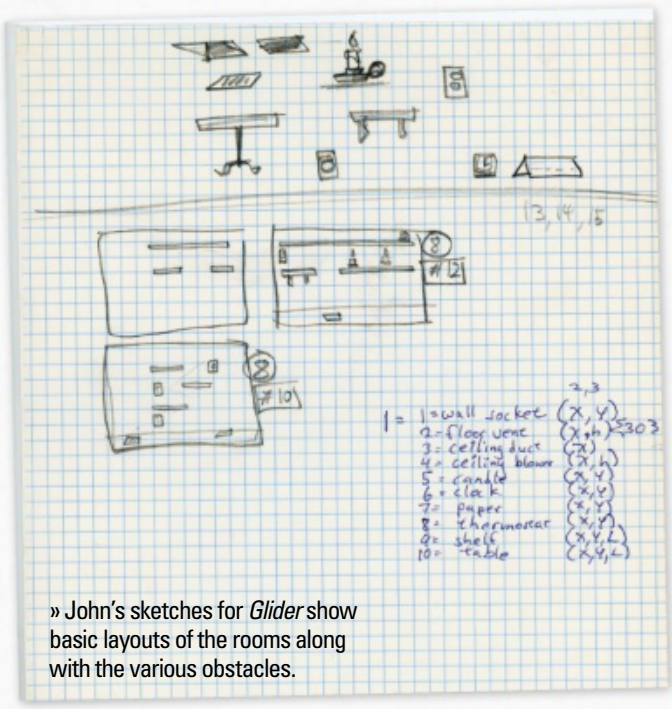
When did programming become a passion?
I suppose when I got the Macintosh Plus. I'd taken out a student loan to help me buy

> I guess the idea of computers and games ignited something in me
>
> John Calhoun

Credit: John Depasquale-photography

SELECTED TIMELINE

- **GLIDER** [1988] MACINTOSH
- **GLIDER 2** [1989] MACINTOSH
- **GLIDER 3** [1990] MACINTOSH
- **PARARENA** [1990] MACINTOSH
- **MACTUBERLING** [1990] MACINTOSH
- **STELLA OBSCURA** [1990] MACINTOSH
- **GLYPHA** [1991] MACINTOSH
- **GLYPHA II** [1991] MACINTOSH
- **GLIDER 4.0** [1991] MACINTOSH
- **PARARENA** [1991] MACINTOSH
- **GLIDER 4.0** [1991] MACINTOSH, PC
- **SPACEWAY 2000** [1993] MACINTOSH
- **GLIDER PRO** [1994] MACINTOSH
- **STEREODROME** [1994] MACINTOSH
- **GLYPHA III** [1995] MACINTOSH
- **GLIDER CLASSIC** [2011] IOS, OS X



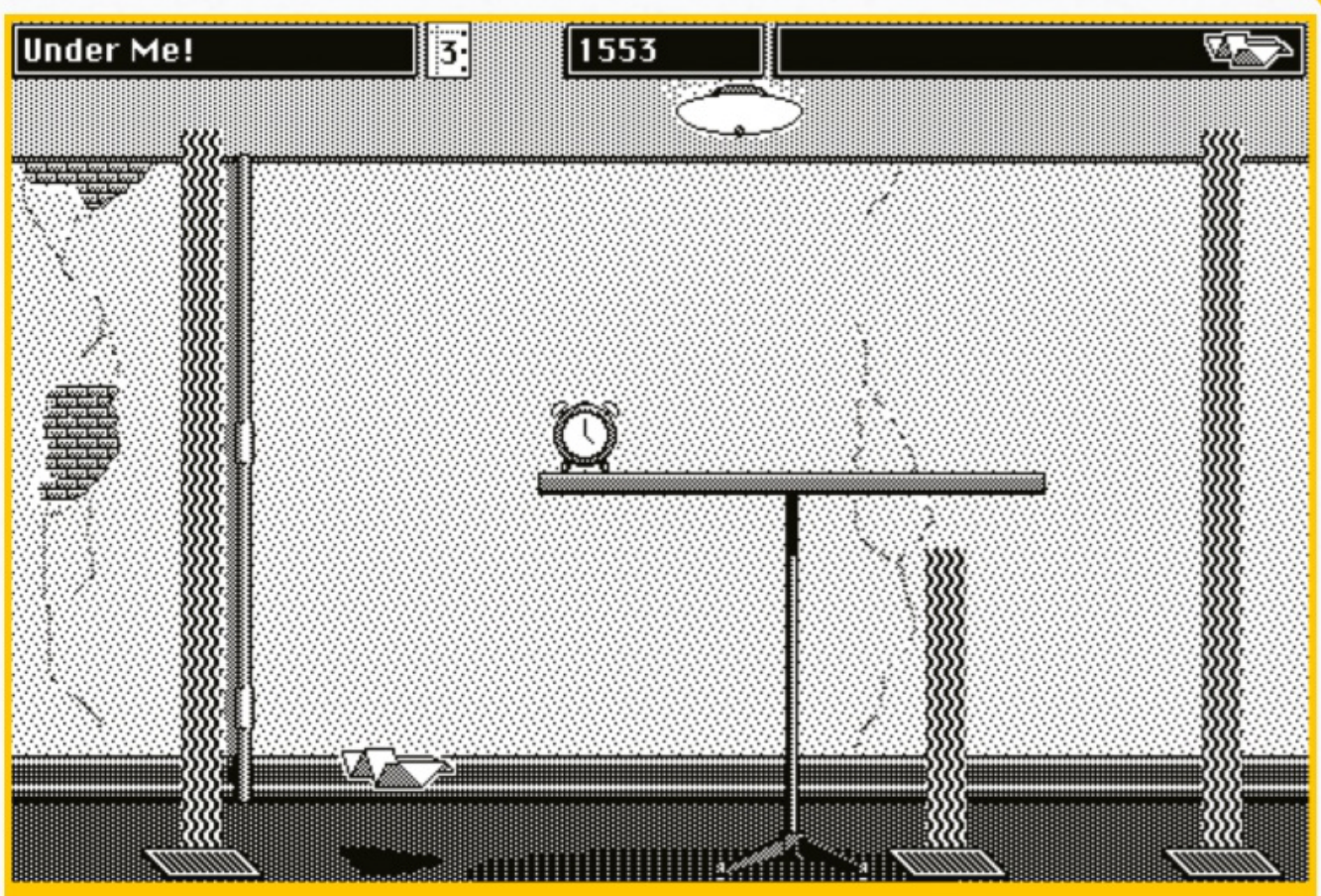
» John's sketches for *Glider* show basic layouts of the rooms along with the various obstacles.

the computer and I felt guilty about it: I had an ulterior motive because I wanted the computer to try and write games even though programming wasn't my degree. But I'd taken a college class which introduced me to Pascal and I used a version of it on the Macintosh. I knew this would enable me to write some games and, of course, I had to pay the student loan back so I don't know why I was so bent out of shape about it. As I recall it cost more than $2,000 but I bought it for $1,200 thanks to a student discount.

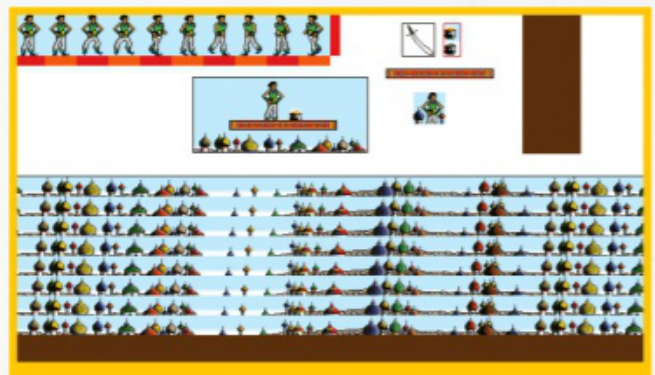
Is this when you began writing *Glider*?
Yes. During one summer at my dad's – once I'd figured out how to re-render the characters on a Commodore – I made a paper aeroplane on a piece of graph paper. It was a traditional dart-shape made up of a letter A on the left side and a B on the right. I then created a little character to represent a vent on the floor and had it so that air would blow out, like air conditioning, and give the glider lift. When the plane wasn't over the vent, it would fall down. And it was just a little distraction; a little thing to play around with that was surprisingly fun.

When I got my Macintosh Plus, I went back to the idea. By now, we weren't drawing characters on the screen any more, we were actually doing full bitmaps and so I figured out how to do some animation. I thought, "Let's draw a little bitmap paper aeroplane and a little bitmap vent with MacPaint and try to get the concept up and running again using Pascal." Then I thought, "What if there were obstacles to avoid?" and I'm looking around the apartment we're renting spotting tables and shelves. I'm thinking, "What if I arrange the table in such a way that you have to duck beneath then avoid the shelf to get to the vent?"

> "Stella Obscura was an experiment with stereo 3D because it was a passion of mine"
> John Calhoun



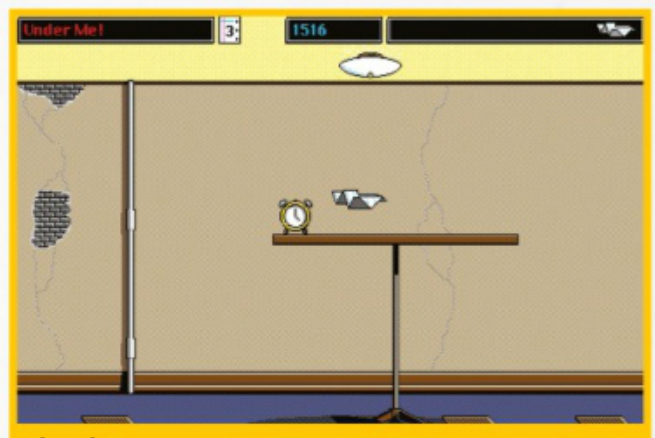
» [Mac] The original shareware version of *Glider* was created in black and white.



» A source bitmap for a work-in-progress game that never saw the light of day. "It was a sort of 'platformer' where you leapt from carpet-to-carpet collecting gold, trying not to fall or get hit by large steel balls," says John

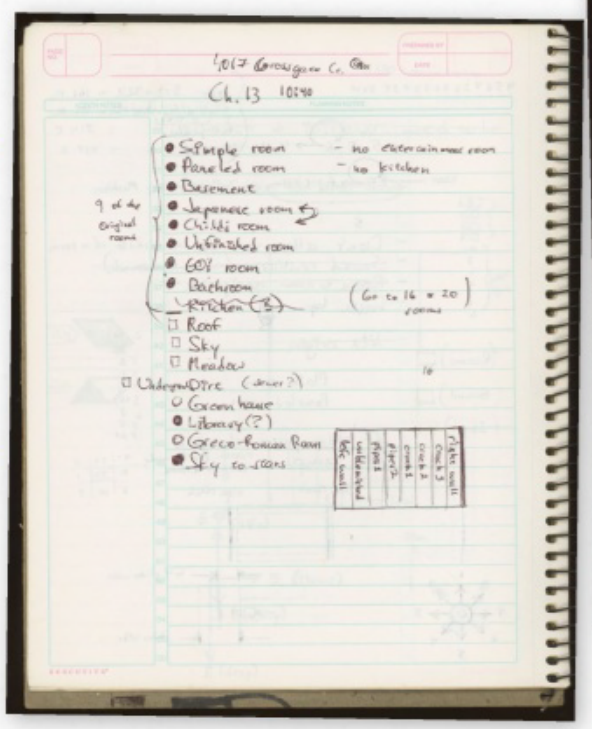
Did you continue doing this until you felt it was worth publishing?
There was a guy called Duane Blehm who played a big part in my decision to publish *Glider*. This was at a time when we didn't have the web but had an internet on college campus as well as bulletin boards. I'd learned to use File Transfer Protocol and universities had big libraries of shareware – all these Macintosh games that you could download and play. It blew my mind! The idea of downloading a game for free and the author begging you to send money felt novel. I thought I could put *Glider* out there without a publisher. It was better than no money at all and having the game sitting on the computer.

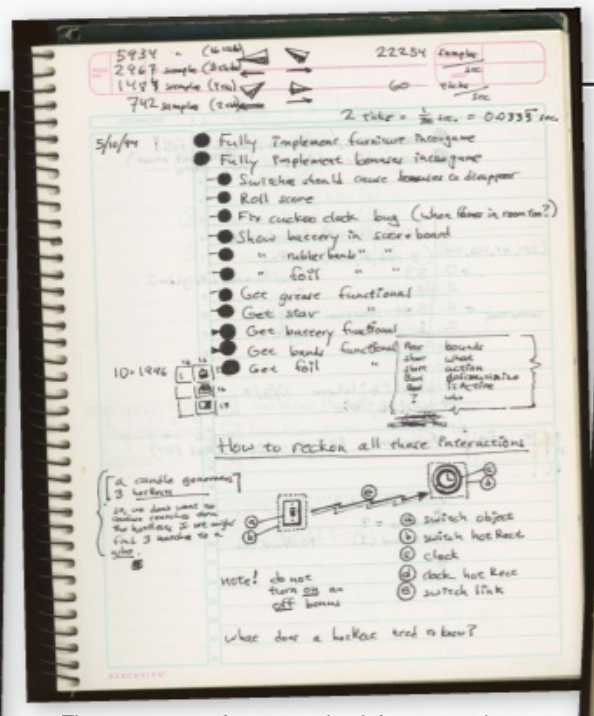
How did Duane Blehm influence you?
He'd written some of the arcade games I downloaded, via his company, Hometown Software. It turned out that he was from

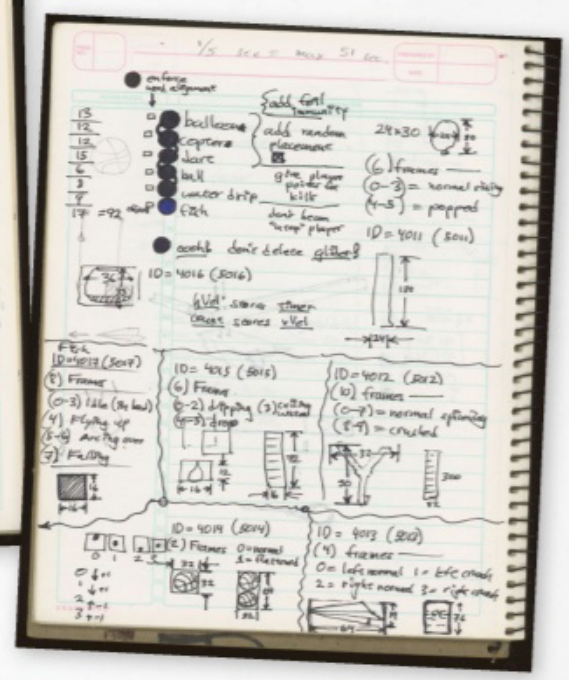


» [Mac] This is a variation of the colour source image (bitmap) for *Glider 4.0*.

» A glider and vent redrawn for the newer MacOS and iOS versions of *Glider*.







» These are pages from a notebook from around 1995 when John was developing *Glider Pro*. "I was marking off features as I implemented them," he says.

Kansas where I was living – right in the middle of the US with pretty much nothing but wheat fields. Most people outside associate Kansas with *The Wizard Of Oz* but this guy was writing shareware games and if you sent him $10 or something, he'd send a floppy disk with the source code. I thought, "Wow, I can see how this guy wrote these games," so I sent him a letter and a cheque, hoping to learn a thing or two. But when I finally got a letter back, it was from his mother. She had said he had died.

Oh no! That's so sad!
His mother was getting letters from people and didn't know what to do about them. She sent me my cheque back: what must his family have gone through? But the spark was there – somebody from Kansas was writing games. It validated that I could do this, too.

And that was the start of an adventure?
I added a high-score table, polished the game and put *Glider* out. I was living with my wife – well, girlfriend at the time – in a shared apartment on campus and once, maybe twice a week, I'd get a $10 cheque in the mail. You could get pizza and a Coke for 10 bucks so it became pizza money.

Did the money motivate you to want to keep creating?
I made about $300 maybe. It was a way of justifying the hours I spent doing it but I just had a drive to create. So I made other versions of *Glider*, although I don't know the differences between *Glider 1.0*, *2.0*, *3.0*… I remember at some point, I figured out how to create sound other than a beep whenever the plane crashes.

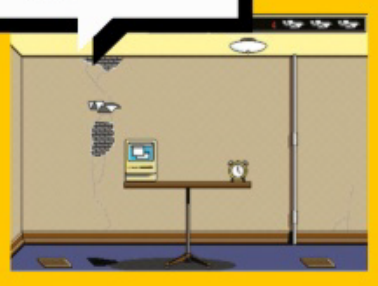
***Glypha* was your second game, wasn't it?**
Yes, based on *Joust* in the arcades. Between high school and college, I worked at a pizza place in Kansas City and they had a *Joust* cabinet we could play for free. I knew the mechanics of the game having played it enough and I was looking to stretch my technical abilities – I thought writing a version of *Joust* would help me to become a better programmer. It was also a fairly static game with lots of enemies and I thought that would be kind of interesting. I'd need to keep all this stuff juggling at the same time within a reasonable framerate.

So you were aiming for a clone?
I didn't want to do an exact clone. I wanted to give it a different look and feel so it had an Egyptian theme with sphinxes and so on. *Glypha* became a love letter to *Joust*: it looked real whereas *Pac-Man* and *Space Invaders* were very abstract.

Of course, there were other games: *Pararena*, for instance…

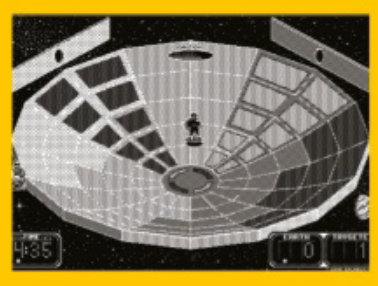
JOHN'S STANDOUT GAMES

From shareware to commercial releases

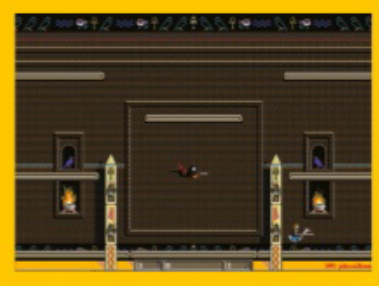


GLIDER
Year: 1988
■ *Glider* involved flying a paper plane through rooms of a house avoiding objects and using air currents to keep moving. The first three versions were shareware but *Glider 4.0* was commercial and introduced colour. *Glider PRO* added power-ups, obstacles and the ability to fly outside. "It was the sweet spot for the series," says John.

STELLA OBSCURA
Year: 1990
■ This 3D stereoscopic game had two slightly different images on the screen and needed a homemade viewer (full instructions provided) in order to play it. "It was vintage Mac only but it'll no doubt run on an emulator," John says. "Don't expect much, but the stereo effect is surprisingly decent."



PARARENA
Year: 1991
■ Introduced as a black-and-white shareware game and commercially as *Pararena 2.0*, players used a mouse to try and score goals against a rival. "If you have two vintage Macs running *Pararena 2.0*, see if you can get the network working," says John. "It was a rarely used feature: network play against another human."



GLYPHA II
Year: 1991
■ A homage to Williams' arcade game *Joust*, *Glypha* placed gamers inside an Egyptian temple with the aim of colliding with enemy sphinxes and reaching higher levels. *Glypha II* added colour and support for 640x480 screens (the black-and-white-version was 512x384). "For those two reasons, *Glypha II* is the better game."

STEREODROME
Year: 1994
■ John never actually finished this scrolling shooter but it continued his fascination for 3D. "I was trying to do anaglyph stereo (red/cyan) rather than via side-by-side images like *Stella Obscura*," he says. "Here too, though, gameplay was an afterthought – I was going for a *Tail Gunner*-vibe if anyone remembers that from the early arcade days."

TAKING A BREAK

Paying it forward with released source code

■ One of the downsides to working for Apple was the inability to develop programs independently. "Suddenly I found out that you couldn't do stuff in your spare time," John says. "Apple assumed it owned everything in terms of programming and it had a right to first refusal yet you couldn't go somewhere else and have your games published."

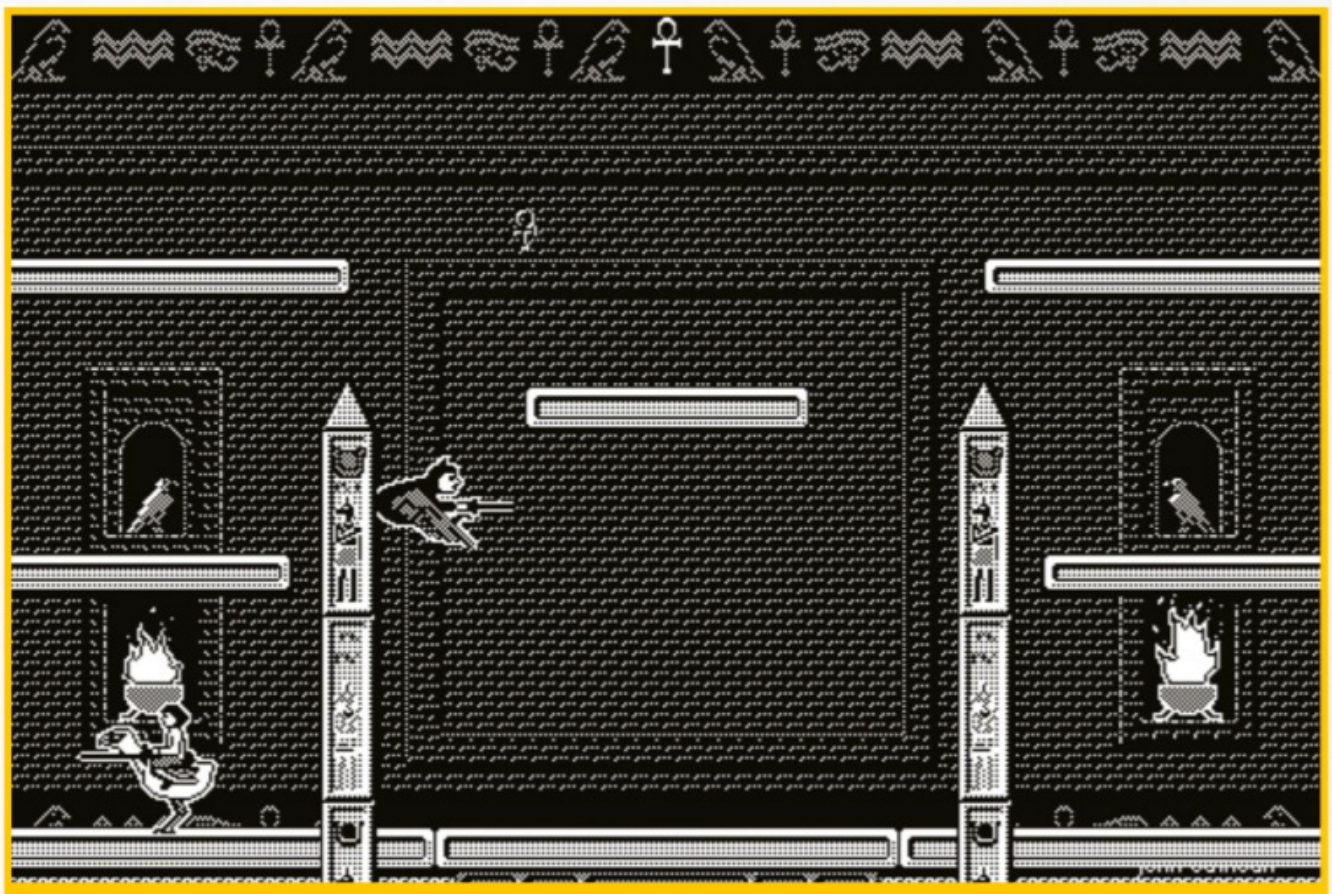
As it happens, John was fine with this. Although any development of games had to be solely for his own amusement, he believed the industry was changing and making it harder for indie developers to make any headway. "You had big players like LucasArts, coming into the fold, writing games that shipped on CD-ROM," he says. "It just felt like the indie games I wrote were just not really on the same playing field."

This, however, changed when the iPhone came out. "I went on a week-long internal Apple course to learn how to program the iPhone and I thought, "Dammit, I could be writing games for the iPhone." So I quit Apple, created *Glider* and a couple of card games and stuff for iOS but went back to Apple because they weren't selling."

Even so, he may have some unfinished business. "I'm back in the Midwest now, living in Nebraska, which is just north of Kansas and my wife is from this area," he says. "So yeah, we're back to the heat and the humidity and that sort of thing and it's almost as if the last 26 years of working for Apple had just never happened.

"I feel like I could almost drop right back into writing shareware again and, I don't know, maybe I will do more. I did a little web game recently just to kind of learn some JavaScript and I may well make another game."

John has also kindly uploaded the source code for *Glider PRO* on to GitHub (github.com/EngineersNeedArt) "It's a kind of a pay-it-forward mindset," he says. "I'd gotten code when I was first learning the Macintosh and learned from Apple's developer magazine so I kind of felt that I should put this stuff out. If it helps somebody else learn to program, that would be only fair."



» [Mac] *Glypha* ran in a 512x342 window and had some lovely, detailed graphics.

Pararena was more difficult to play than *Glider* but it had a small fanbase of people who were really into it. It had a roller-derby arena and you'd skate around, trying to catch a ball and score. This was based on me having seen the 1975 film, *Rollerball*, and I'd been playing with physics, having little balls roll around like a game of billiards where they can ricochet off the walls and each other; toying with collisions and physics interaction of objects. Then I thought of making the arena like a dish and it was kind of like, "Gee, you know, is there a game here? It's kind of fun." But it was also hard to control your player and to release the ball at the right time to go into the goal.

> "Glypha didn't have a future because it was such an obvious knockoff of Joust"
> John Calhoun

There were some great experiments, too. The 3D stereoscopic game *Stella Obscura* springs to mind.
Stella Obscura was an experiment with stereo 3D because it was a passion of mine. It's like those old stereo viewers that would have two images side by side and I played around with something similar on a computer. The idea was to have the enemy ship just off by a pixel left or right in one versus the other and see if that would give a sort of depth effect? It did, but it was too much of a novelty thing, asking players to essentially build a stereo viewer to attach to their computers to play.

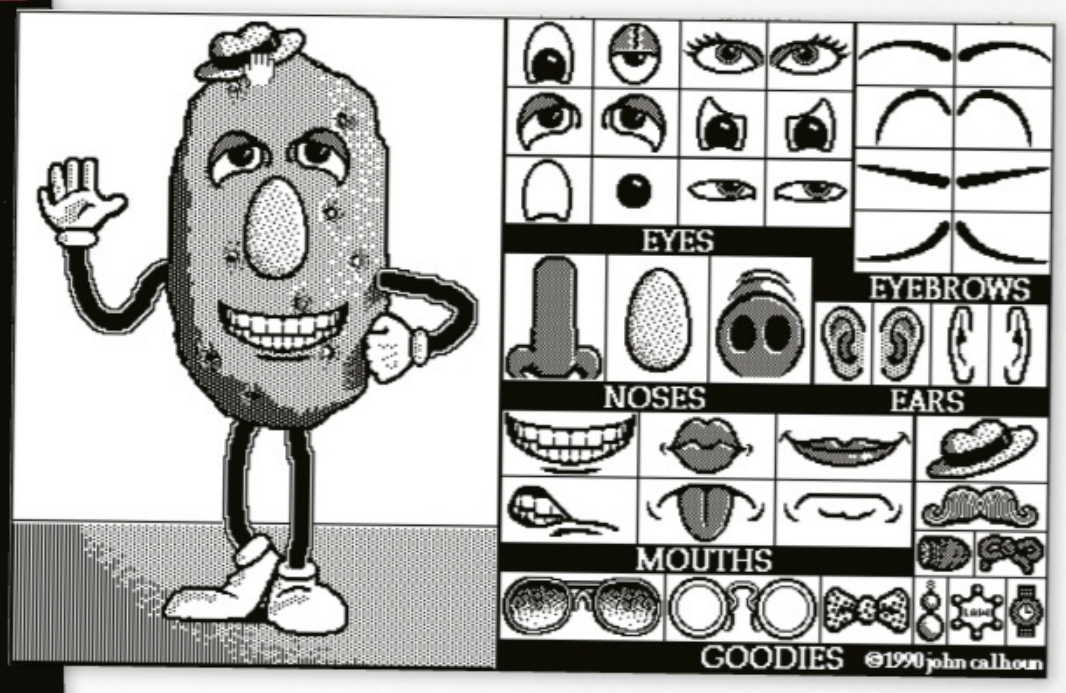
Did people do that?
There's a funny YouTube video from a guy that reviews old Macintosh games and he built one of these. It's entertaining to watch. But the game itself was a proof of concept. There was a bit of eye strain after a while, too – certainly in programming it. I spent a lot of hours staring at the screen through that stereo viewer.

It was a bit different to another of your games, *Mac Tuberling*, wasn't it?
Yes. *Mac Tuberling* was like a Mr Potato Head game and I was trying to target a younger audience, I thought maybe there should be more young kids' games on the Macintosh so I'd have children drag a mouth and eyes and stuff like that to a little potato. I thought it was really cute.

You looked to create games commercially. Why move away from shareware?
I was finishing my education degree at college and looking at getting my teacher certificate but, I'd read *Hackers* by Steven Levy. There was a chapter discussing kids going to write games for Sierra out in California, drinking bottles of Coke, playing *Dungeons & Dragons* and coding. I thought, "Wow, I missed out." I decided I'd try and get a game published so I called some publishers. Casady & Greene was the second I called and I asked if they'd be interested in a commercial version of *Glider*.

Did they ask you to make changes?
I told them I'd take it to the next level, adding colour and a level editor and they sent me a contract offering 15% of the sales revenue. They advanced me the money to buy a colour computer and I got a Macintosh IIsi, did the work and looked to see if programming games had legs. When *Glider* came out, it won Best

» [Mac] *SpaceWay 2000* was a simple arcade shoot-'em-up that retailed for $50 (or $30 mail order).



» [Mac] There are some definite Mr Potato Head vibes going on here. The game would verbally tell you which facial feature was being added.

Arcade Game for the Macintosh in *Macworld* and sales went through the roof. I made $70,000 in my first year of royalties. I thought, I can sit at home and write games and get paid for it and, if it didn't work out, I'd get my teacher certificate and teach.

You also developed *Pararena* for Casady & Greene, didn't you?
With some trepidation. I added colour and added an easier level of difficulty with a wide goal that made it hard to miss. As the game kind of progresses, the goal gets smaller and smaller. But it didn't sell. I started to have an inkling that game writing might be short-lived.

Did you consider turning *Glypha* into a commercial game?
No, *Glypha* didn't have a future because it was such an obvious knockoff of *Joust*, I'd have been embarrassed – never mind the legal implications. There was a grey area with shareware, although *Glypha* was actually freeware. If Williams tried to sue for all the money I made on it, they'd get a big fat zero.

But you created a colour version of the game.
I needed to learn how to program in colour so I thought I'd use *Glypha* to do it. I figured I'd hear from people if the game didn't work on a certain Macintosh but felt a little guilty that I had this ulterior motive.

You also created a game for the Apple Newton. How did that come about?
Casady contacted me because Apple was asking if Casady & Greene knew anyone who could develop an application for the Newton. I was told I'd be given a ticket and a Newton, be taught how to program it and maybe come up with something. So that's what I did. They had a weird prototype splayed out on acrylic that let you see inside. It was connected to a Macintosh IIfx – you'd develop on the computer and send it to this development board. I thought if I could draw a card on the screen and maybe move it around by the end of my week at Apple, that was 90% of the work right there. The rest was standard card game logic. One I made a set of casino games called *Silicon Casino*. But I think most people only used the Newton's built-in software rather than download new stuff. It didn't sell well.

How did you end up collaborating on the game *Spaceway 2000*?
There was a guy from Chicago called Jeff Robbins who created a utility called Conflict Catcher for Casady & Green. I ended up working on the artwork for it – the icons and stuff like that – and then Jeff said he thought it would be fun to do a game. He was a much smarter person than I am and I thought it would be interesting to work with him but I didn't want to make it my game and it ended up being a game designed by committee – a mishmash of ideas. I learned a lot but the game didn't have a cohesive whole. When Jeff, later working at Apple, was tasked with getting Apple's operating system working on the PowerPC, he told me *Spaceway 2000* was one of the first things he ported, though.

And then, after all of that, you ended up working for Apple. How did that come about?
When I was at the University, there was something called Usenet which had a Macintosh programming subcategory. I ended up spending time on that, answering people's questions and asking questions, that sort of thing, I came to the attention of one of the engineers at Apple and it turned out they needed a graphics engineer. I was invited to fly out to California to be interviewed. I don't think I would have even thought to have applied. So yeah, I got the job and my girlfriend and I went for a Chinese meal to celebrate. The fortune cookie said, "Take the path that has been set before you." It was like, "Wow." So we moved to California and that would be the next 26 years of my life.

STICKING TO THE MAC

Why John never moved to other systems

■ John Calhoun spent his entire career either developing games for Apple platforms or working for Apple itself. But why didn't he earmark other flourishing platforms at the time? After all, there were lots of home computers to develop for, from the 8-bits to the 16-bits.

"I didn't think of myself as being really that smart of a programmer," he says. "I thought of myself as a Macintosh programmer because I'd kind of struggled for a year to get to where I could do games like *Glider* on the Macintosh.

"To go to a different platform, such as Windows or the Amiga, I'd have to learn the development environment and learn how to program the graphics routines on that platform. That was kind of intimidating. I thought that's like starting in kindergarten again'.

"But I also just loved the Macintosh. It just spoke to me in a way other computers never did. Even the Amiga – I think I was being kind of a bit uppity about the user interface and stuff which looked second rate. I'd look down my nose because their icons looked kind of crappy. They weren't even the same size so it felt a little amateurish."

Ultimate Ghosts 'N Goblins

TERROR GOES PORTABLE

» PSP » 2006 » TOSE

Even when the PSP first came out, aspects of it felt decidedly retro to me. Sure it had a cutting-edge LCD screen and sure it was able to offer PS2-type experiences, but in the palm of your hand, yet it also had a lot of retro stuff on it, so it regularly appeared in the reviews section of the magazine.

Those links to gaming's past didn't just come in the form of compilations, of which there were many, with *Activision Hits Remixed* and *Capcom Classics Collection Remixed* being particular favourites. In fact, Capcom literally jumped on the retro bandwagon by releasing a number of compilations (*Power Stone Collection*) updating past games (*Breath Of Fire III*, *Mega Man: Powered-Up* and *Street Fighter Alpha 3 Max*) or simply making brand-new games in long-running franchises, which leads us nicely to *Ultimate Ghosts 'N Goblins*.

Developed by Tose, *Ultimate Ghosts 'N Goblins* was a perfect fit for Sony's powerful portable. The widescreen display allowed you to fully appreciate the macabre-looking environments that Tose had crafted, but also proved to be a great way of showing off the game's many intimidating bosses, with the snake we're showing here being a cracking example.

While Tose was more than happy to lean on previous tropes from the series, it did introduce new weapons and altered how magic worked. These introduced tweaks were useful as, despite a new Novice mode, Tose's game was just as tough as its predecessors. In fact, its namesake Ultimate mode is insanely difficult, so much so that I've never managed to finish it.

A revised version called *Gokumakaimura Kai* which tweaked enemy placements, reworked the magic system and offered numerous other enhancements was released in 2007, but only in Japan. Maybe I should give that version a try instead…

RETRORATED

» This month we build the latest Lego set, try out all the games on Capcom's second Stadium collection, test the latest Evercade cartridges and find out if Chris Scullion's new book will have you jumping for joy

» Yes it's expensive, but there are a lot of interesting builds for your money.

Atari Video Computer System

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF NOSTALGIA

INFORMATION

- **FORMAT REVIEWED:** LEGO
- **ALSO ON:** NA
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £209.99
- **PUBLISHER:** LEGO
- **DEVELOPER:** LEGO
- **BUY IT FROM:** LEGO.COM

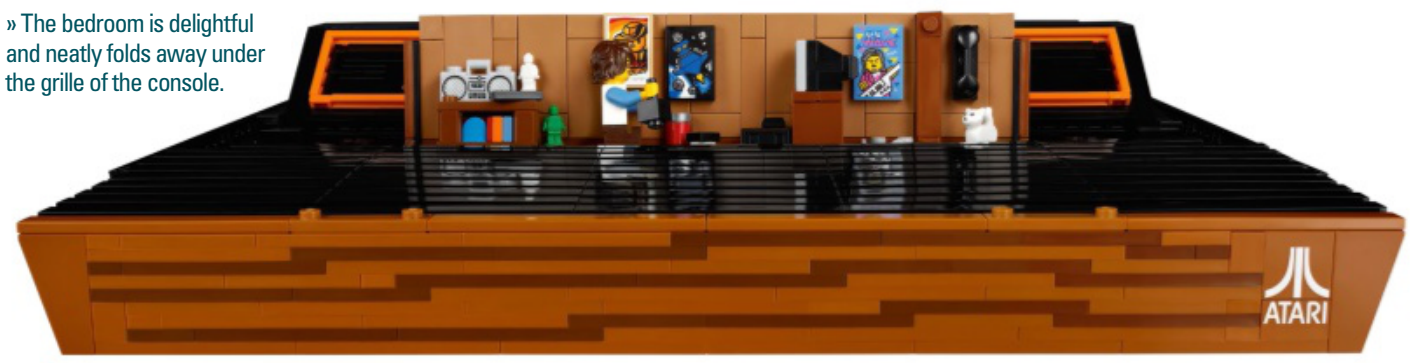
Few companies are as successful as mining nostalgia as Lego is. Like a grizzled prospector doggedly searching for gold Lego leaves no stone unturned in its search for the next big thing to excite its adult collectors, whether that means assembling Lego DeLoreans from *Back To The Future*, building gigantic Bowsers and NES models from the *Super Mario* series or revisiting its old toy lines from the Seventies and Eighties.

Its latest project will no doubt baffle just as many people as it delights. After all, why spend over £200 on a replica of an Atari VCS when you can simply buy a machine and a handful of games for a fraction of the price? Well, because it's cool that's why. And there's no denying that Lego's latest project is a lovely thing which had us getting nostalgic for the original console as we tackled its six-hour plus build time.

Let's address the elephant in the room before we move on though. Eagle-eyed readers will have noticed that the build only has 2,532 pieces to it, which seems a baffling decision considering it's only 68 pieces away from 2600. Baffling or not, we've no issue with the numerous other decisions that Lego has settled on for the VCS.

BRIEF HISTORY

» Lego has come a long way since its early building blocks that appeared in the late-Forties. While it continues to make its traditional playsets it has found just as much success featuring licensed builds that cover everything from *Star Wars* to Marvel, as well as more intricate sets that are largely aimed at adult Lego enthusiasts.



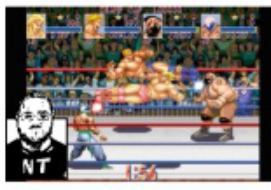
» The bedroom is delightful and neatly folds away under the grille of the console.

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

Evercade: Jaleco Arcade 1

I always regretted selling my PCB of *P-47: The Phantom Fighter*, so I'm delighted to legitimately own it again.



NICK

Capcom Arcade 2nd Stadium

I'm a simple man – give me *Saturday Night Slam Masters* and *Puzzle Fighter* on the go and I'll be happy.

» If this charming little figure doesn't fill you with joy you may want to check your pulse.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

ATARI VCS

▼ SOMETHING NEW

THE MIGHTY BOWSER

The presentation for the new set is superb, which is exactly what we've come to expect from Lego. The box design is excellent and evocative of the original Atari VCS box, while the build is presented within a 260-page manual that features a history of the machine, small pieces on the included games and a word from the design team. It's also sprinkled with fascinating nuggets of trivia throughout, meaning you've got plenty to read as you work your way through the manual's steps.

Spread across 11 bags the Atari VCS takes up the majority of the build time and is filled with plenty of lovely touches like the clever woodgrain effect and grille and the hidden diorama of a kid playing Atari in his room, which pops up when you slide the front cover of the completed model forward. This part of the build is the most satisfying and also one of the trickiest bits and there's a fair bit of construction in the innards which can be tricky to get right and caused a hasty rebuild once we realised we'd forgotten to turn a key part of the build over. While some aspects of the build feel a little laborious (the grille springs to mind) there are more than enough parts which require intricacy with plenty of small moving pieces. In addition to the actual Atari VCS and its joystick (which actually wiggles) you also get to build cartridges of *Asteroids*, *Adventure* and *Centipede*, with a mini storage case to stack them in (and before you ask, the carts slot nicely into the VCS' cartridge slot). The carts, like the system itself are virtually 1:1 in scale and they're very nice to build, largely because each one comes with a neat vignette stylised on the game in question, so a castle for *Adventure*, a space diorama for *Asteroids* and a cool space centipede for *Centipede*. Each of these smaller builds take around 25-30 minutes to make, with the sticker placement being the trickiest part, particularly the *Centipede* cart, which requires you to line up the cover's red strip with two adjacent red square tiles.

While the Atari VCS is clearly the star of the show, Lego realises that it's a big thing to build and it's paced the construction of the set quite well meaning you start off building the *Adventure* cart pieces and vignette, then the storage cabinet, before moving onto the Atari VCS. You then take a break roughly half-way through to build the *Asteroids* cart and vignette and then finish off with the joystick and *Centipede* cart and its accompanying vignette. It's all paced in such a way that construction always feels interesting and boredom or frustration never sets in.

Of course, no matter how interesting the set is to build and how nice the finished product looks, there's no escaping that it's one of the more expensive Lego sets out there (it's the same price as the NES build which actually contains more pieces) but it's a display piece and a very good one at that. If you can afford the steep entry price you'll find a very enjoyable and satisfying set. ✱

» It looks amazing when the console and accompanying builds are finally finished.

IN A NUTSHELL

It's expensive, but smart design choices and a clear love of the subject matter makes it a Lego set that's very hard to pass up.

PICK OF THE MONTH

Capcom Arcade 2nd Stadium

WHY REBUILD THE COLOSSEUM?

INFORMATION

- **FORMAT:** SWITCH
- **ALSO ON:** PS4, XBOX ONE, PC
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** FREE (WITH ADD-ONS)
- **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM
- **PLAYERS:** 1-4

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION RELOADED (PSP)

▼ SOMETHING NEW
CAPCOM ARCADE STADIUM (SWITCH)

BRIEF HISTORY

» Capcom has long celebrated its arcade heritage with retro-gaming compilations, beginning with the *Capcom Generations* collection on the PlayStation and Saturn. *Capcom Arcade 2nd Stadium* is the latest effort, a follow-up to last year's *Capcom Arcade Stadium*. Like its predecessor, it includes games from the company's beginnings in the mid-Eighties up to the CPS2 board, a powerful 2D system that was regularly used from 1993 to 2001.

When the original *Capcom Arcade Stadium* launched, our impression was that it was meant to serve as a platform to be built on, with new packs of games to launch in the future. We were clearly mistaken, as *Capcom Arcade 2nd Stadium* is now here with 32 more games for fans to enjoy.

The package is free to download on all platforms, with *Son Son* included as a way for you to try it out, but further games must be bought. The individual games are priced fairly reasonably at £3.29 each, but unless you are only interested in a very small number of the games, the full 30-game bundle is far better value at £32.99. *Gun Smoke* is the final game, a bonus available only to those who buy the full bundle.

In terms of presentation and options, there's no real difference to the original *Capcom Arcade Stadium*. That's not a bad thing though, as you're given plenty of options to play around with – you can choose between English and Japanese versions of most games, rewind gameplay and save your game. There are a variety of visual options too, with filters including scanlines and CRT simulation options. You can rotate the display, change wallpapers or even play with a variety of 3D cabinets. There are also online challenges to take part in, if you wish to do so.

That leaves the games to carry the package, and it's a good selection. As you'd expect, fighting fans are well catered for with the *Street Fighter Alpha* trilogy and three *Darkstalkers* games,

» [Switch] The 3D viewpoint is novel, though not the ideal way to play in handheld mode.

» [Switch] The *Street Fighter Alpha* games are highlights of the package, as you'd expect.

» [Switch] The CRT-style display filter is about as convincing as you'll get at this resolution.

» [Switch] *Three Wonders* is nice to see here, and again brings a welcome dose of variety.

plus *Saturday Night Slam Masters* and *Pocket Fighter*. *The King Of Dragons* and *Knights Of The Round* will satisfy the beat-'em-up crowd, *Mega Man* fans will be pleased to see his two arcade outings here, while *1943 Kai*, *Eco Fighters* and *Side Arms* will be appreciated by shoot-'em-up types.

Compared to the first compilation, there's a little bit more variety to be found here. There are some puzzle games in the mix thanks to *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo*, *Pnickies* and *Block Block*, and *Capcom Sports Club* is a welcome addition that incorporates football, basketball and tennis. If there are any criticisms to be made, there are naturally a couple of games you won't spend too much time on such as the original *Street Fighter* or *Savage Bees*, and there are arguably fewer iconic games on offer than in the original *Capcom Arcade Stadium*.

There's a sense that Capcom is treading on its own toes a little with recent retro releases, as six of the games here can also be found in last month's *Capcom Fighting Collection*. Unlike that release, *Capcom Arcade 2nd Stadium* doesn't offer any extras like concept art or online play, but it does have superior visual options and allows you to create saves for each individual game. This means you'll have to base your purchasing decisions on the features you prioritise, which isn't ideal.

» [Switch] *Pnickies* isn't the best puzzler ever, but the variety is certain to be welcomed.

In a nutshell

Capcom's quirky product release strategies aside, *Capcom Arcade 2nd Stadium* is a very good compilation. There's no context for what's here, but the options on offer make the actual play experience hard to beat.

>> Score **84%**

Turrican Anthology Vol I & Vol II

» System: Switch (Tested), PS4 **» Buy it from:** Online **» Buy it for:** £29.99 (each)

Don't worry, you haven't slipped back in time. Though *Turrican Flashback* brought Factor 5's classic run-and-gun series to modern hardware about a year-and-a-half ago, we now have a more comprehensive pair of compilations to enjoy from the same team, based on Strictly Limited Games' physical editions.

The first volume includes the Amiga versions of *Turrican* and *Turrican II*, the SNES game *Super Turrican* in both regular and *Director's Cut* versions, and the *Mega Turrican* score-attack demo. The second includes the Amiga version of *Turrican 3*, the Mega Drive game *Mega Turrican* and its *Director's Cut* version, *Super Turrican 2* and a *Super Turrican* score-attack demo. Unfortunately, there are no 8-bit versions available.

If you like having plenty of features, you're well catered for here. You can choose a standard game with save states and a rewind option, plus unlockable cheats, or a challenge mode. Video, audio and control are all highly customisable, and you even get novel options like the ability to show hidden information. Original manuals are available, and you can unlock galleries and jukebox tunes too.

Though the packages themselves are both rather good, splitting the collection into two volumes at this price feels quite stingy – both volumes include Amiga, Mega Drive and SNES emulation, so we can't see why it wouldn't be possible. Releasing them so soon after *Turrican Flashback* also doesn't feel great, especially as these compilations were announced at the same time as *Flashback*.

If you don't have any *Turrican* compilations yet, the first volume offers a little more bang for your buck since *Mega Turrican* and *Turrican 3* are essentially different versions of the same game. If you did buy *Turrican Flashback*, it may be worth skipping the first volume as the two compilations share most of their games.

» Score Vol I **78%** Vol 2 **75%**

» [Switch] By turning on the map options, you get a wider view showing hidden hazards.

» [Switch] *Super Turrican 2* is a great game that wasn't on the *Turrican Flashback* compilation.

Mega Man Battle & Fighters

» System: Switch
» Buy it for: £7.19 **» Buy it from:** Online

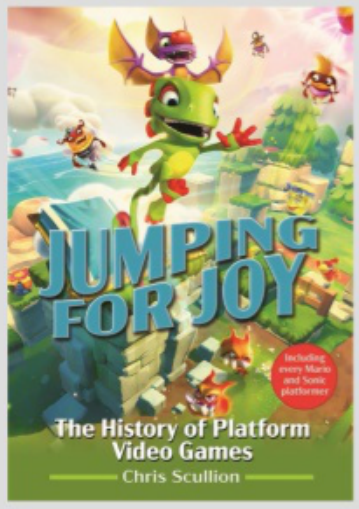
After a couple of decades as an expensive import curio, this Neo Geo Pocket Color game finally gets a wide release. It's a miniaturised version of the two *Mega Man* arcade games, which were essentially boss rushes featuring classic enemies from across the series. If that sounds appealing, there is plenty of it to get through and it's a nice-looking game. The usual *Neo Geo Pocket Color Selection* presentation is here, but the presentation is undermined by the fact that the in-game text hasn't been translated and is still in Japanese. There's a brand-new translated manual to refer to, but you'll do so frequently as there are lots of menu options to navigate.

NICK THORPE

» Score **76%**

Jumping For Joy: The History Of Platform Video Games

» Buy it for: £25
» Buy it from: pen-and-sword.co.uk



The history of platform games is a broad subject to tackle in just 168 pages, and the author Chris Scullion takes a good crack at it here – he knows his stuff and the book is engaging and informative throughout. The first two sections consist of comprehensive coverage of the *Mario* and *Sonic* series, with 50 more iconic games making up the third. Consequently there are odd coverage imbalances, with *Super Mario Bros* getting just half a page compared to *Bubsy The Bobcat*'s two-page spread, while the likes of *Jet Set Willy* and *Braid* are given just 50 words each in box out entries. While it's still a good read, we can't help but feel that a different structure or more pages could have helped.

NICK THORPE

Evercade: Jaleco Arcade 1

» System: Evercade **» Buy it for:** £17.99
» Buy it from: Online, retail

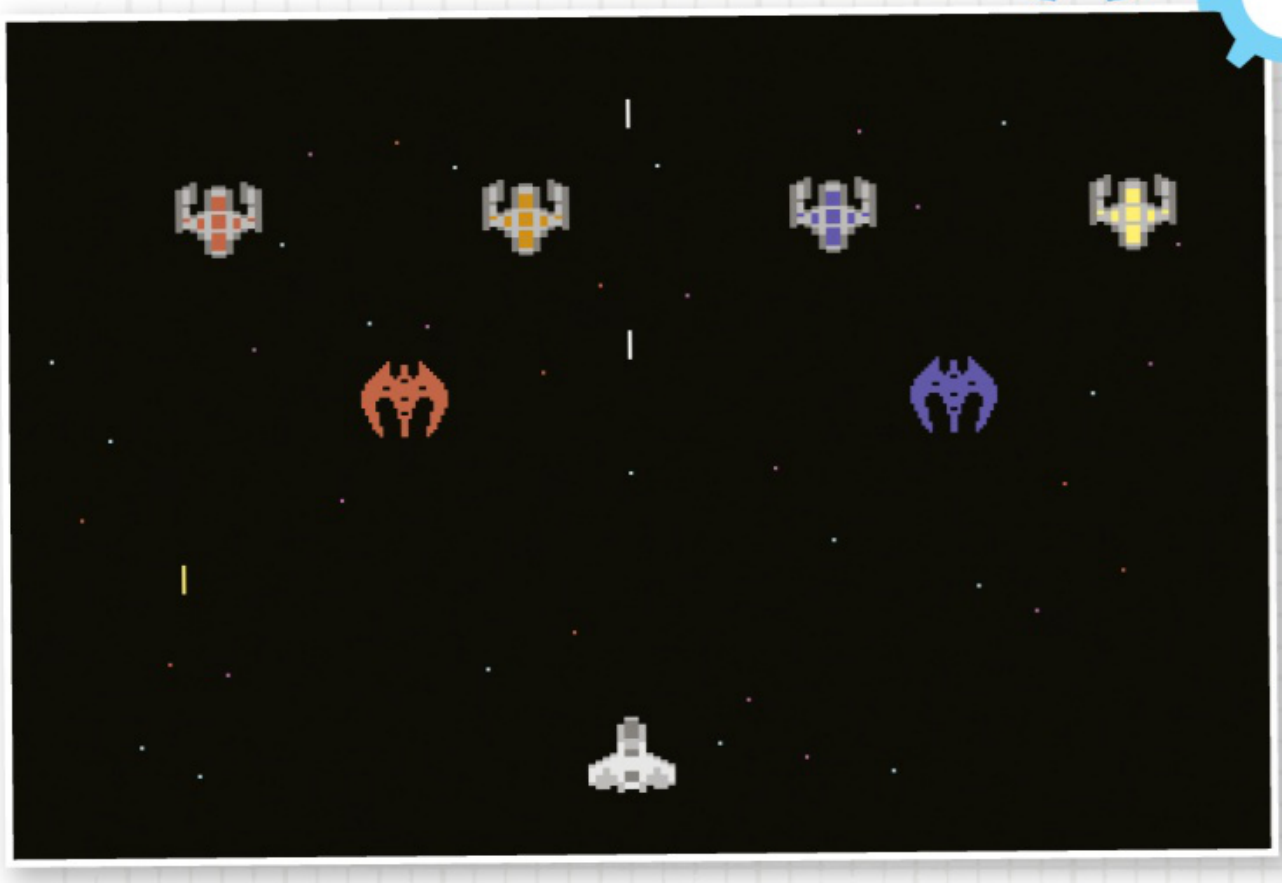
It's great to see Blaze releasing its arcade-themed carts on a more regular basis. *Jaleco Arcade 1* is a solid offering with *P-47: The Phantom Fighter*, *Rod-Land*, *Avenging Spirit* and *Saint Dragon* being the obvious highlights. The remaining games are *64th Street: A Detective Story*, *The Astyanax*, *EDF: Earth Defence Force* and *Cybattler* and they're all of a decent quality, although *Cybattler* does suffer when playing on the handheld due to its vertical orientation and *64th Street* is a little sedate for a scrolling fighter. Emulation seems up to the usual quality, although we noticed some weird ghosting when playing on the Evercade VS (restarting solved this issue, though). All in all *Jaleco Arcade 1* is a good selection of games at a very reasonable price.

DARRAN JONES

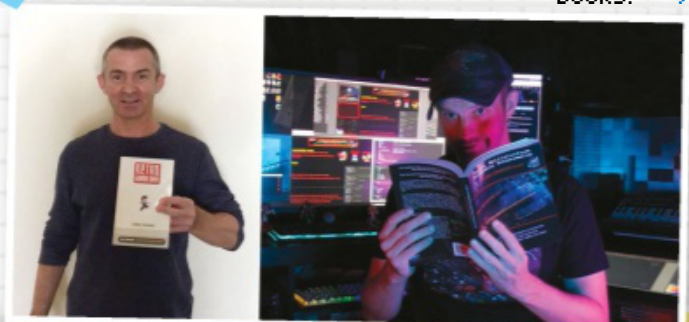
» Score **80%**

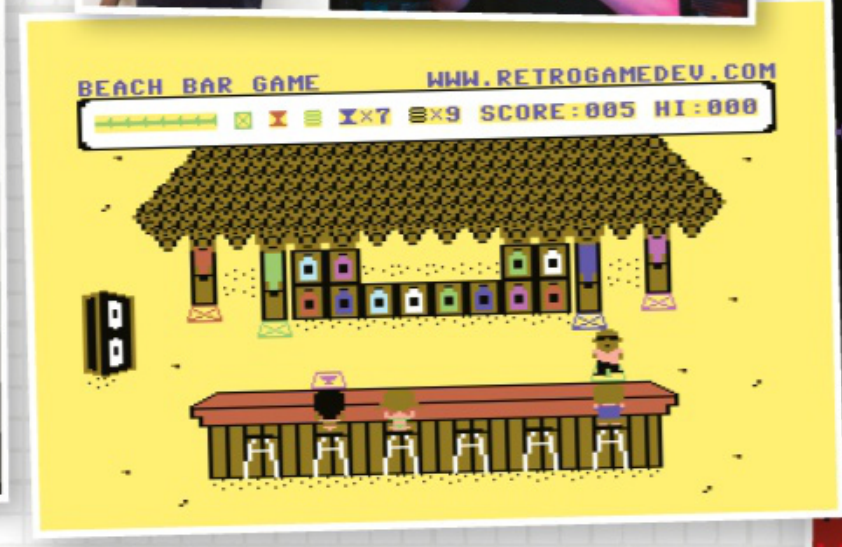
THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>



<!--- DEREK MORRIS (LEFT) AND AKUYOU (RIGHT) WITH THEIR PROGRAMMING BOOKS. --->





<!--- [C64] THIS IS THE BEACH BAR EXAMPLE GAME FROM RETRO GAME DEV VOLUME 2. --->

<INTRO> A BIG SHOUT OUT TO THE YEAR 6 PUPILS OF BEARSDEN PRIMARY SCHOOL, WHO HAVE TAKEN PART IN THEIR ANNUAL ZX SPECTRUM CODING EXPERIENCE. WITH THE HELP OF JONATHAN CAULDWELL'S ARCADE GAME DESIGNER, THE PUPILS HAVE DESIGNED AND CREATED A DOZEN NEW GAMES AVAILABLE AT BIT.LY/BEARSDEN-2022 IT'S A SPLENDID EXAMPLE OF HOW TO GET PEOPLE INTERESTED IN CODING; ANOTHER WAY IS TO READ THE PROGRAMMING BOOKS DISCUSSED IN OUR MAIN NEWS STORY. </INTRO>

<MAIN HEADER>

BINARY BOOKS

<INTRO> FOR THOSE WANTING TO LEARN HOW TO PROGRAM HOMEBREW GAMES, THE BOOKS FROM DEREK MORRIS AND AKUYOU ARE ESSENTIAL READING </INTRO>

<BODY> **Derek Morris has been a professional programmer for many years.** "I hope in some small way to help keep the enthusiasm for retro games and machines alive. They can be a perfect training ground to educate the next generation of developers."

His *Retro Game Dev* (retrogamedev.com) series comprises of two C64 books, with a NES volume in progress. "My small books aren't to teach everything you need to know in one shot, but more to spark the imagination of what could be possible."

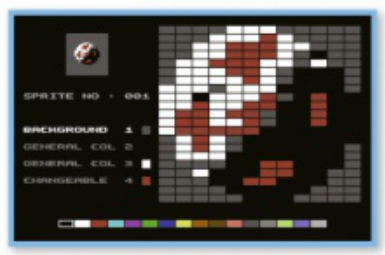
Derek uses a modular approach, building up subroutines and sections of reusable code. "I try to write books that I'd like to learn from myself. My books set a game feature up, tinker with the code and see what affects your changes have. Then if you want to dive deeper, look into the code libraries and reference textbooks." *Volume 1* had two example games, a single-screen shooter, and a scrolling platform game, while *Volume 2* features a single multi-screen game. He changed his development environment from CBM PRG Studio to a combination of Visual Studio and Kickassembler, "[I did it] because you can develop on Windows/OSX/Linux, and Kickassembler is very popular among the C64 development community." Akuyou (Keith) created a series of YouTube videos on assembly programming

TERRIFIC TOOLS

<INTRO> FIVE WAYS TO MAKE GAMES WITHOUT CODING KNOWLEDGE </INTRO>

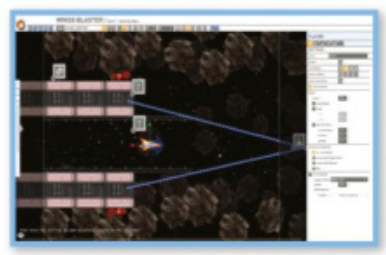
MULTI-PLATFORM ARCADE GAME DESIGNER
Windows

<Based on Jonathan Cauldwell's Spectrum Arcade Game Designer, this allows you to target 8-bit computers with a simple scripting language. />



THE SHOOT-'EM-UP CONSTRUCTION KIT
C64

<Sensible Software's superb *SEUCK* has a series of editors for graphics, sounds and attack waves, and has spawned more than 700 C64 games. />



SHMUP CREATOR
PC

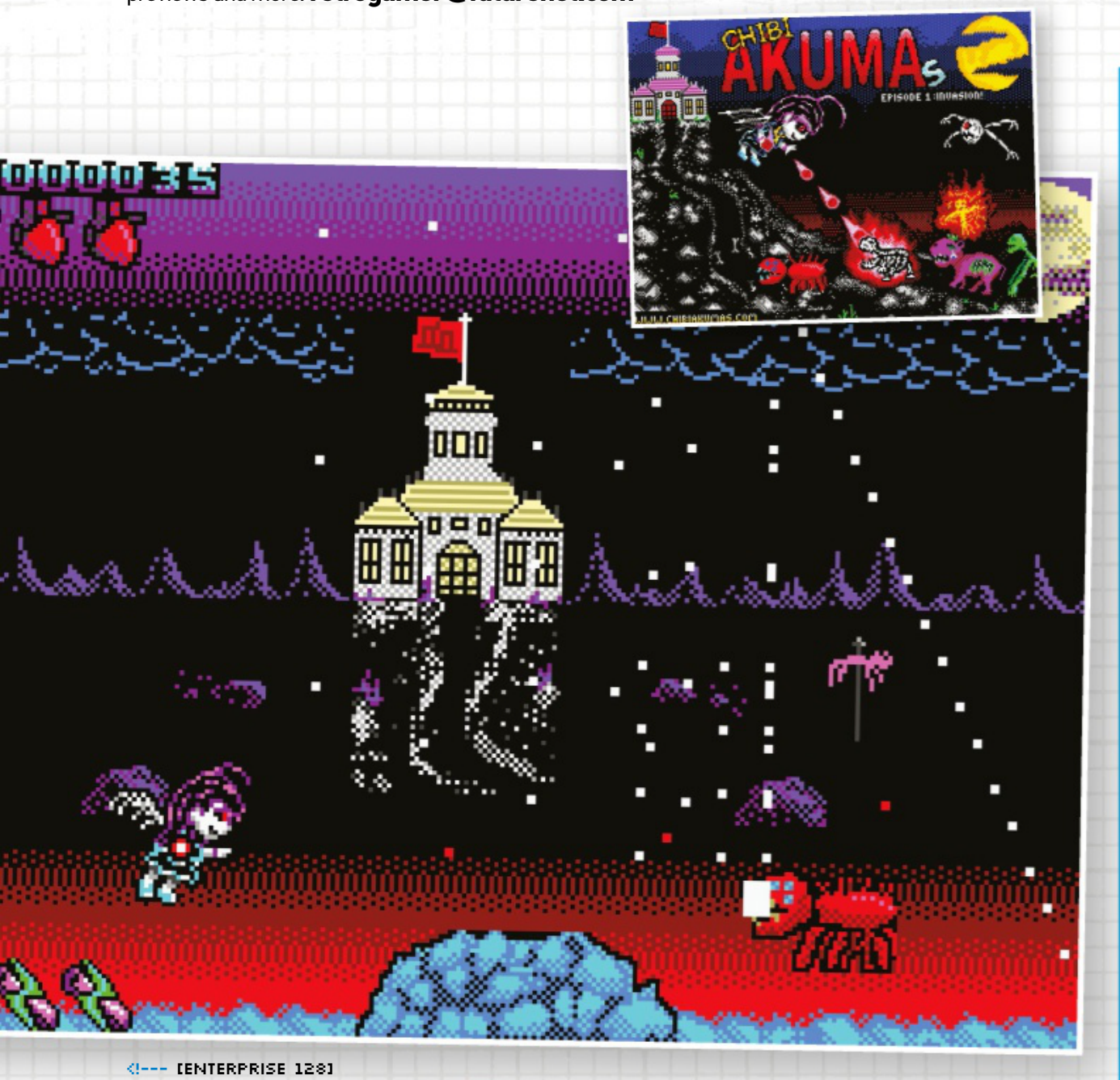
<Inspired by *SEUCK* and Nemesis II, Bulo Studios' utility has an uncomplicated interface with advanced features including particle effects and bullet-hell patterns. />

GAMEMAKER
PC

<Beginners can make games by dragging and dropping, while advanced users can use the scripting language. The most famous GameMaker creation is *Undertale* (pictured). />

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

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<!--- [ENTERPRISE 128]
AKUYOU'S CHIBIAKUMAS
EPISODE 1, RUNNING ON
THE Z80 PROCESSOR. --->
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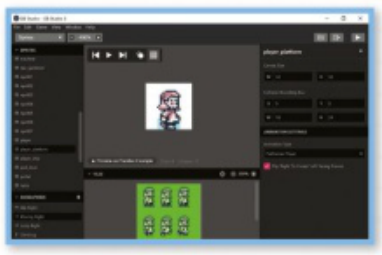


GB STUDIO

Windows, Mac, Linux

<This is a useful tool for anyone wanting to make Game Boy games. Drag and drop to easily create a Game Boy title, importing artwork and exporting as a ROM or HTML file to play in a browser. />

that became the basis of his first book – *Learn Multiplatform Assembly Programming* (LearnAsm.net), with a second volume now published. His books feature short examples for each processor, with reference lists of commands. "I find practical demonstrations and modifiable downloads the best way to learn. I hope that the tutorials will give people the ability to get started on their programming journey." Volume 1 covers familiar processors such as the 6502 (C64 and Atari 8-bit), Z80 (ZX Spectrum and Amstrad CPC) and 68000 (Amiga/Mega Drive), while Volume 2 has the 65816 (SNES) and ARM Thumb (Game Boy Advance).

"I like to keep things as simple as possible," says Keith, "so apart from Winape (with its built-in assembler/debugger), I only use Notepad++ and command line assemblers and emulators. The tools packages I have for download on my website are the same ones I use on a day-to-day basis." He also created the multi-platform *ChibiAkumas Episode 1*, a horizontally scrolling shoot-'em-up. "The game took around 600 hours over 6 months. I wanted to try to make a game for the CPC that took ideas from other games and comics I liked but was something unique."

The books, which are available on Amazon, are clearly inspiring people. Derek says, "Follow the fun! I know of at least a couple of boxed C64 games that accredit my books." Keith's final advice? "Aim low and start small! There's a wealth of old books for free on Archive.org and other sites that you can learn from." </BODY>

NEWSBYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, DIVIDED BY FORMAT FOR YOU </INTRO>

<**Atari ST:** An impressive one-level demo of *Metal Slug* for STE (4MB of memory) launched, with a separate Mega Drive demo. Try it at masteries.itch.io/metal-slug-for-megadrive-ste />

<**Atari XL:** *Self-Striking Stick* from Salmax is a clever puzzle game where you must protect the moving stick as it bursts soul bubbles. Find it at salmax.net/indexen.html />

<**Amstrad CPC:** Recent releases include *Goody* by 21bloques – 21bloques.itch.io/goody – and *Paco El Hombre* from jjaranda – bit.ly/pacoelhombre The anticipated GX4000 conversion of *Blinky's Scary School* has also been completed. />

<**C64:** The free version of *Lykia – The Lost Island* launched on 14 July, with the cartridge (Protovision) and disk/USB cassette (Psytronik) due this autumn. More info at psytronik.itch.io/lykia />

<**Mega Drive:** Geri8 has released Platformer Engine, for the SGDK development kit. It's available at geri8.itch.io/platformer-engine />

<**PC:** Ben James has finally released his fantastic *Exolon Redux*. Give it a try by visiting benjames171.itch.io/exolon-redux />

<**VIC-20:** Huffleduff has been busy with *YASIC* (*Yet Another Space Invaders Clone* – 16K memory expansion) that includes music, cutscenes and speech, and the vertically scrolling *Galaxian Sleena* for the unexpanded VIC. More at huffelduff.itch.io/ />

<**ZX Spectrum:** In *Ghoste's Grunge*, you must help GhoSte find his lost music and instruments. Appropriately, it has great 128K music from KUVO. Give it a try at buck.itch.io/ghostes-grunge

And in *Bufonada*, you swap control between a crazy jester and his magic goat in this very clever puzzle platformer created by Roolando. It's at roolandoo.itch.io/bufonada />

<**Spectrum Next:** Pat Morita Team announced a Kickstarter for *Shovel Adventure*'s conversion to the Next. Visit it at bit.ly/shovel-next />

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

CHAMPION CODER

JEFFREY JANSSEN

<INTRO> MEET THE HOMEBREWER WITH AN AFFINITY FOR THE PHILIPS CD-I </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: THE NETHERLANDS WEBSITE: TWBURN.ITCH.IO/GOODDEALGAMES.COM/INVENTORY/CD-I.HTML FORMAT: CD-I RECENTLY CODED: NOBELIA DEVELOPING: SKYWAYS />

<!--- A WILD CD-I GAME APPEARED! JEFFREY JANSSEN WITH A FRESH COPY OF NOBELIA. --->

WHAT DREW YOU TO DEVELOP FOR PHILIPS' CD-I?

<I was looking for something interesting to do during COVID, and I still had a CD-i player with games in the attic. I started by making a USB controller adapter. I did some experiments and had some great help from the community. />

IS THERE A PARTICULAR DEVELOPMENT ENVIRONMENT?

<*Nobelia* is programmed in C, so I had to use a 32-bit Windows VM to run the tools. After compiling, a new disc image is built which I test in CDiEmu. Every so often I also burned a CD-R to test it on my actual CD-i. I created my own tools to convert graphics. I decided to release them as open-source in case others might find those useful. The music and audio were converted using the original tools used by developers back in the day. />

WHAT INSPIRED NOBELIA?

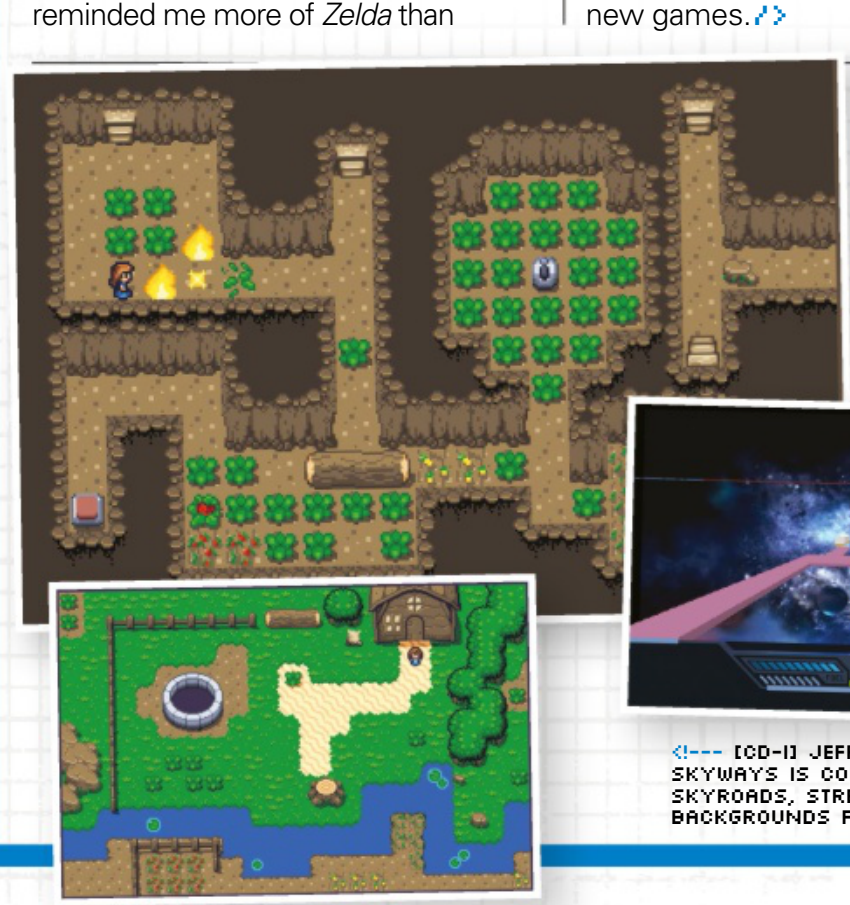
<I thought *Bomberman* was a nice fit. I started looking for a public graphics set that would fit my needs. It however reminded me more of *Zelda* than *Bomberman*, so combining the two styles felt natural. />

ARE YOU HAPPY WITH THE PHYSICAL RELEASE THROUGH GOOD DEAL GAMES?

<During development, I got quite a few requests to make a physical release, so I looked into getting discs professionally pressed and ran a poll to see if it would be economically viable. I got a nice quote to press the discs, and get the artwork printed, so I went that route. The biggest concern was that there was no company anymore that had experience pressing CD-i discs. The moment I put the first disc in my own player and saw that it worked felt great. The response and interest exceeded my wildest expectations! />

BEFORE YOU GO, ARE YOU WORKING ON ANY MORE CD-I-BASED HOMEBREW TITLES?

<During development, I got a lot more familiar with CD-i's capabilities. I'm currently trying things out, for example, the Full Motion Video system, that I can hopefully use in new games. />



<!--- [CD-I] NOBELIA REFERENCES ALFRED NOBEL, INVENTOR OF DYNAMITE, AND IT IS LEFT UNSAID WHETHER NOBELIA MEANS THE MAIN CHARACTER OR THE WORLD'S NAME. --->

<!--- [CD-I] JEFFREY'S NEW PROJECT SKYWAYS IS CONVERTING DOS GAME SKYROADS, STREAMING PRE-RENDERED BACKGROUNDS FROM THE DISC. --->

DATA BURST

<!--- [AMIGA] THAT FIRST FLOPPY DISK IS TANTALISINGLY OUT OF REACH FOR NOW --->

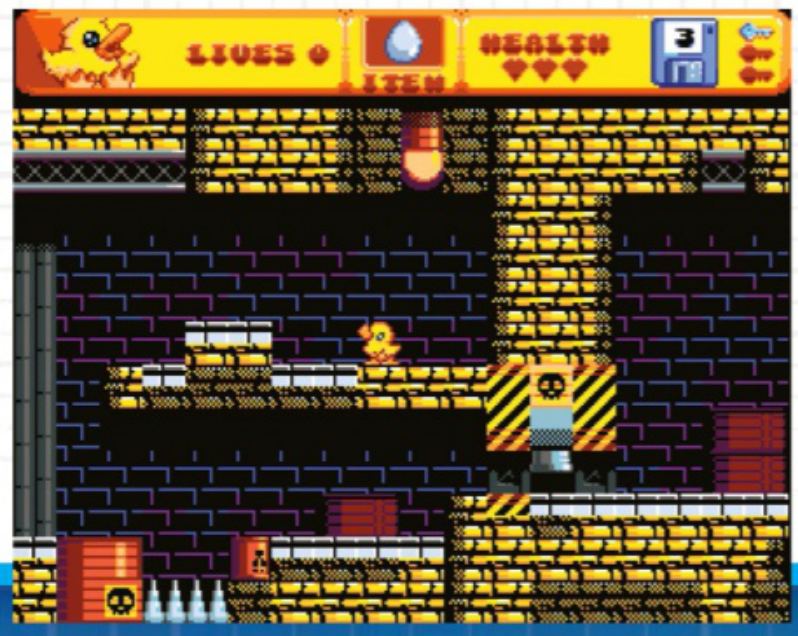
DUCKSTROMA

<INFO BY: ULTRANARWHAL FORMAT: AMIGA (1MB OF MEMORY REQUIRED) PRICE: $2.99 OR MORE VISIT: BIT.LY/DUCKSTROMA />

<BODY> **Built with Scorpion Engine (see RG236), this is a remake of a NES prototype that also appeared on ZX Spectrum and MSX (all available for free from the link).** Aura the delivery duck must find and return eight floppy disks, but that won't be the end of her tasks. To help her get around, she can drop an explosive egg – and by timing her jump right, she'll get an extra boost to help her reach higher platforms. While some enemies can be jumped on to squash them, others are fatal to the touch. Spikes and plungers will also harm our poor little duck, so be careful. Switches open new areas of the level, and the plinths can be activated to 'remember' your starting position for your next life.

Duckstroma is an extremely cute game, with the diminutive graphics working well and there's a funny *Rick Dangerous*-style death sequence. The music is good too but is on a noticeably short loop, so may become overly familiar when you have been playing for a while. And you will be – as using the eggs to move around is an interesting twist. There are some great ideas here and plenty of hidden secrets to find (such as a handy extra life in the first above-ground section). Amiga fans should not duck away from playing this gem. </BODY>

SCORE: 82%



THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

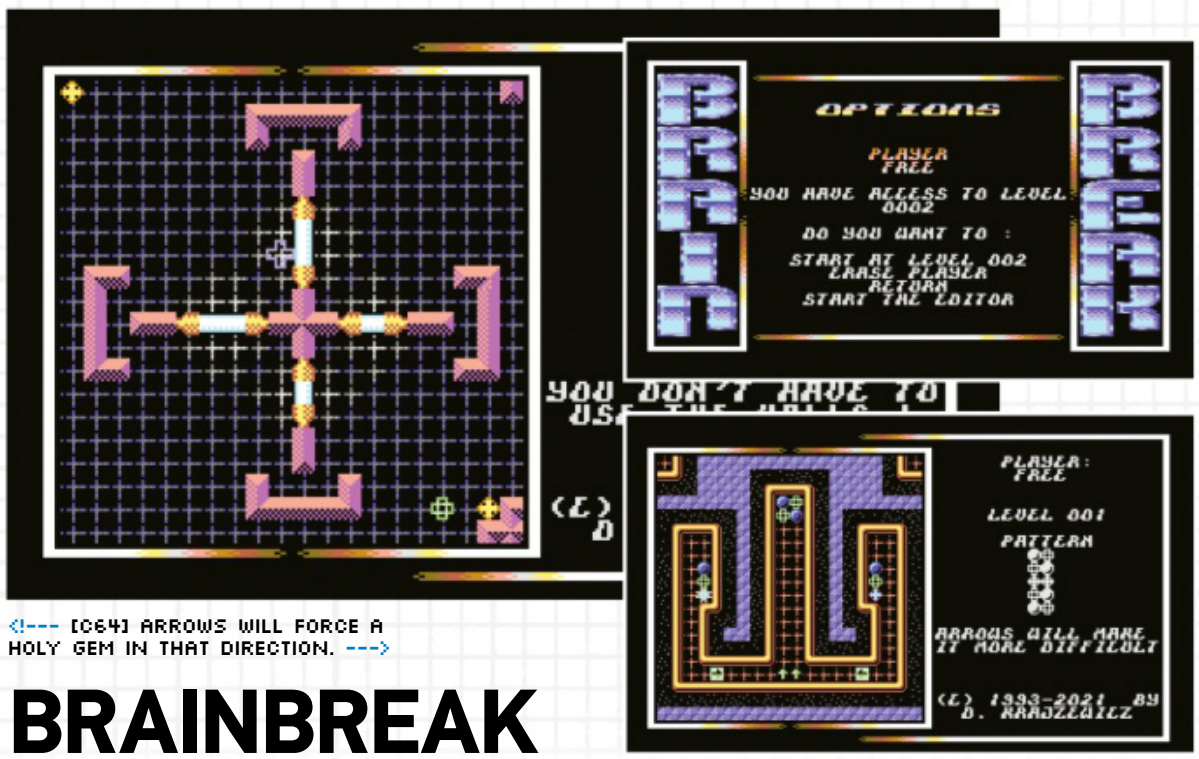
<!--- [AMSTRAD CPC] THE KEY CARD ON THE RIGHT WILL COME IN HANDY, IF YOU CAN REACH IT... --->

RED PLANET

<INFO BY: FURILLO PRODUCTIONS FORMAT: AMSTRAD CPC
PRICE: FREE DOWNLOAD
VISIT: BIT.LY/REDPLANET-CPC />

<BODY> **There's trouble on Mars again, so our intrepid astronaut needs to find ten lots of explosives, place them in the depot, race back to the control centre and activate the detonator.** Key cards are needed to open certain doors, while plasma bullets and your oxygen supply are limited; these are topped up by collecting reloads and cylinders (leave some for the return journey). The excellent title music leads into the brilliant four-colour game graphics, with detailed sprites and plenty of variety in the backgrounds. The gameplay is classic platform fare with lifts, lava, and enemies to avoid or shoot. This is a terrific addition to the Amstrad library, made with the Mojon Twins' Mk1 Engine, and it's free to download. </BODY>

SCORE: 80%



<!--- [C64] ARROWS WILL FORCE A HOLY GEM IN THAT DIRECTION. --->

BRAINBREAK

<INFO BY: PSYTRONIK – DANIEL KRAJZEWICZ, ANTTI HANNULA FORMAT: C64
PRICE: DIGITAL $4.99 / PHYSICAL FROM £9.99–£24.99 VISIT: BIT.LY/BRAINBREAK-C64 />

<BODY> **Restore the holy gems across 100 levels as you slide them around to match the pattern shown.** Pieces keep moving until they hit something, with later levels adding gates, teleporters and other features to make things trickier. There is also an editor to create your own puzzles, and multiple user slots to save your progress. This is a nicely presented puzzle game with hi-res graphics and pleasant music accompanying the action. It's not stretching the C64, but it will stretch your brain. </BODY>

SCORE: 77%

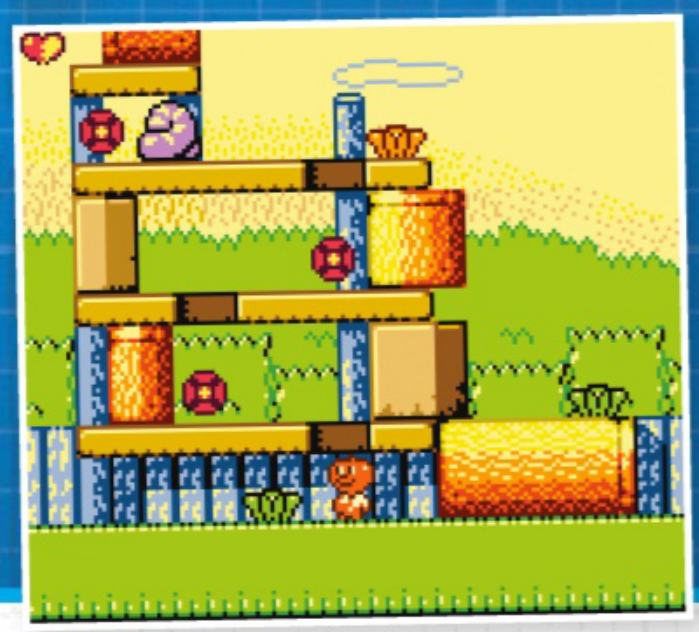
PROCESSING

<INTRO> MAX OAKLAND IS CREATING NEW GAME BOY COMPATIBLE GAMES – WITH RUBY & RUSTY, AND WINK </INTRO>

<BODY> **"I make games in GBstudio because I've always wanted to make a real Game Boy game," Max tells us.** "The limitations can create tons of creativity and streamline the development process." *Ruby & Rusty* is published by Bitmap Soft (bit.ly/rubyrusty). "I was planning to publish the physical release myself, but it's been great to have a team to work with. My biggest inspiration was living on a farm for a bunch of years when I was a kid, with a vibe straight out of the original *The Wizard Of Oz* novel – so that's what inspired the storybook aesthetic."

Next up is *Wink And The Broken Robot*, a demake of his earlier NES title. "I post my art on Instagram (instagram.com/maxoakland.art) and you'll often see things from there pop up in my games. I'm proud of the music. I went with a short but sweet level concept inspired by *Super Mario 3*'s level length." Max will soon be adding mini-games to the demo version, available at bit.ly/wink-demo </BODY>

<!--- [GAME BOY COLOR] WINK CAN FIND COINS, SHOOT ENEMIES AND DISCOVER ANCIENT CDS AS HE EXPLORES. --->



HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

NINJA SKILLS

Looking at the gaming heroes with real ultimate power

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

Ninjas have been a staple character trope in games for decades, and while they're frequently enemies or parts of an ensemble cast, they're often perfect for starring roles too. We got together to discuss why the shadowy assassins have managed to fascinate audiences for so long.

NICK

Clearly, ninjas are the best videogame heroes. Why do you think that is?

TIM

Because pirates suck.

NICK

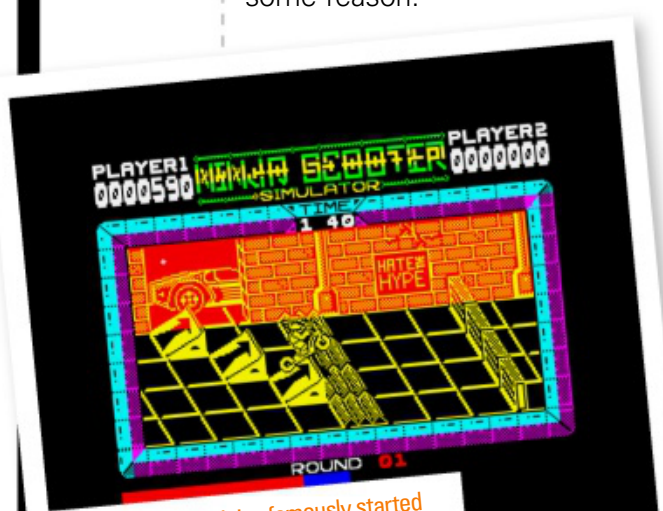
That's true, for some reason there aren't many great pirate-themed games. But ninjas? You've got *The Last Ninja*, *Shinobi*, *Strider*, *Ninja Gaiden*, *Tenchu* – I could go on. Ninjas are agile, they're deadly, they're mysterious and just very cool.

TIM

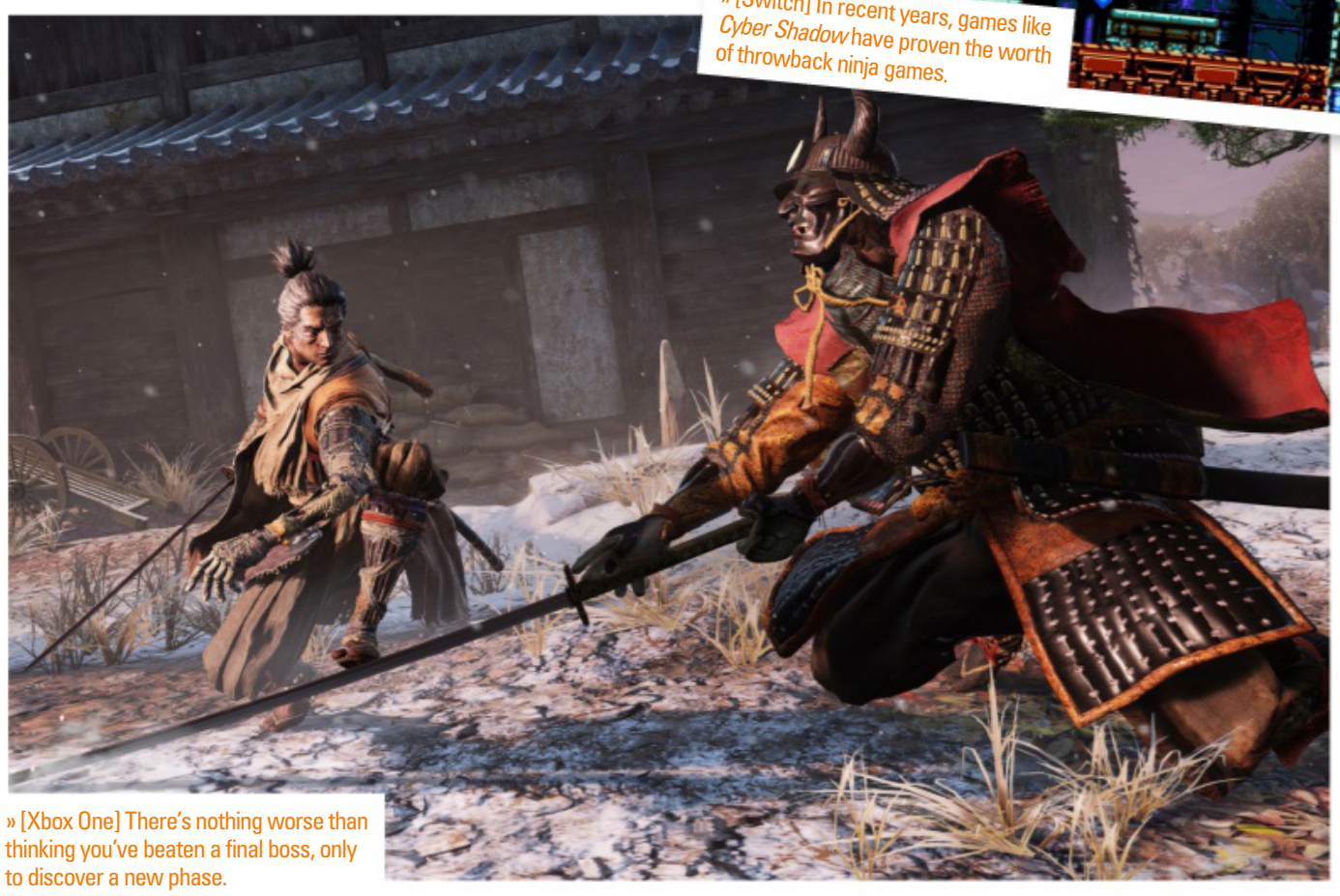
And they flip out all the time!

DARRAN

Can I let the record show that I didn't suggest ninjas just so we could talk about Strider Hiryu, the ultimate ninja. I was actually thinking of *The Last Ninja* for some reason.



» [ZX Spectrum] Ninjas famously started using scooters after being banned from Tokyo's horse-drawn railways in 1887.



» [Xbox One] There's nothing worse than thinking you've beaten a final boss, only to discover a new phase.

» [Switch] In recent years, games like *Cyber Shadow* have proven the worth of throwback ninja games.

Those eyes on the cover. So much promise.

TIM

I loved *The Last Ninja* and all its puzzles and weapons. I think it's probably the first ninja-themed game I played.

DARRAN

I know you had the ninja in *Bruce Lee* before that and I recall a ninja game by Mastertronic but *The Last Ninja* certainly sticks out for me. Ninjas did seem to be everywhere during the Eighties.

TIM

Oh yeah! The tiny ninja and his wee stick!

NICK

Shinobi's probably my first, given that the Turtles were heroes rather than ninjas in the UK. Do you think that being viewed as dangerous helped the popularity of ninjas back in the Eighties?

DARRAN

I think that's a fair point, Nick. Ninjas just looked cool for starters with all that black garb and the crazy weapons. Who wouldn't want to replicate that as a kid? I mean you had a game by Silverbird called *Ninja Scooter Simulator*. That's how popular ninjas were.

NICK

Then of course there's *Ninja Golf*, which is actually surprisingly good.

TIM

Huh, they really just slapped 'ninja' on everything back then.

DARRAN

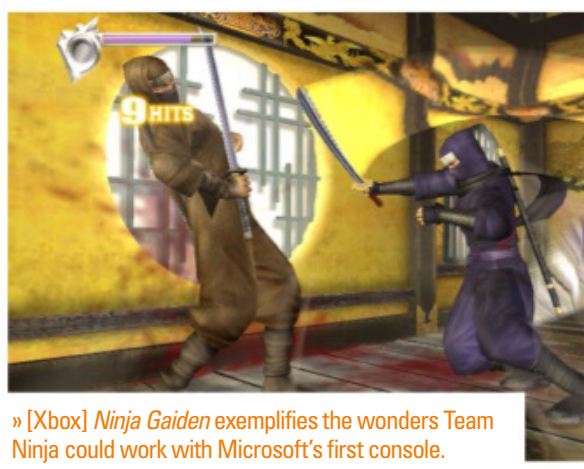
They sure did, Tim. Nick, was your *Shinobi* on Master System? *Shinobi* was the very first game I purchased for my Master System. I remember being initially disappointed that it was nowhere near as good as the arcade game, but in retrospect it's actually pretty decent and plays to the console's strengths.

NICK

Yeah, I got the Master System game. I'd never played the arcade game, so I really enjoyed it even though I found it incredibly difficult as a kid.

DARRAN

Oh man the arcade game was amazing. I was eventually banned from our local Circle K as they had a machine there and I could complete it on a credit.



» [Xbox] *Ninja Gaiden* exemplifies the wonders Team Ninja could work with Microsoft's first console.

TIM

I played it a good few times in an arcade, I spent quite a bit of money on it too. I eventually got the Amiga version. Ninjas are just cool. I'm playing *Cyberpunk 2077* at the moment and I try to ninja every mission, until it invariably messes up and then out come the blades. Why do we think ninjas work so well in games?

NICK

I think it's because you can go a few different ways with ninjas. You can go for the movie-style stuff where they're inhumanly fast and can cut you in half before you can even blink, or you can take a more realistic stealth approach, like *Tenchu*.

DARRAN

That's a good point about their versatility, Nick. I hadn't considered that.

TIM

And they're usually silent protagonists too.

DARRAN

Good point, Tim. Imagine a ninja with the boisterous voiceover of DJ Stryker from *Burnout 3*. Yuck. I think I definitely veer towards the movie-style ninjas as stealth often leaves me cold. It's why I love *Strider* so much, it's not only incredibly cinematic with sensational setpieces, but also makes you feel like an absolute badass when you're playing it. As do Team Ninja's later Xbox games.

NICK

I remember being blown away by that first Team Ninja one, it looked phenomenal and I was convinced that 3D combat could never get better. I definitely needed to get better though, it was brutally tough.

TIM

It's so very difficult. I tried playing it again recently and I still can't get very far through the city. I did nearly complete *Sekiro*, but that last boss has three phases. Three!

DARRAN

Sekiro scares me. It sounds way too difficult for my tastes. I remember absolutely rinsing *Ninja Gaiden* when it came out and it was a nice surprise to find the earlier games as unlockables as well. The less said about *Ninja Gaiden 3,* though the better. I believe they're all currently available on contemporary systems now too.

NICK

For some reason, all the best ninja games these days seem to be throwbacks like *The Messenger* and *Cyber Shadow*. The last really good one I enjoyed before *Sekiro* was *Metal Gear Rising*, which was absurd in all the right ways.

DARRAN

Oh man. *Rising* is completely ridiculous. Running up those missiles before slicing them up never gets old.

TIM

Ninja Blade might top that in terms of cutscene nonsense – you throw a motorbike at a massive mutant snail!

DARRAN

I don't really know how to follow that sentence! So I won't. ✱

> "Then of course there's Ninja Golf, which is actually surprisingly good"
> **NICK THORPE**

» [C64] *The Last Ninja* series was a formative ninja experience for many a gamer, we'd wager.

» [Arcade] Strangely, hearing the term 'P45' makes you reconsider your decision to omit a *Strider* screenshot.

» [Arcade] Legend has it that Darran is still not allowed within 20 feet of a *Shinobi* cabinet.

» [PlayStation] *Tenchu* is probably more authentic to the actual ninja experience, but stealth isn't for everyone.

NINJAS FOREVER!

Readers share their favourite ninja-themed games

Paul Darbyshire
When I was a kid it was all about *Ninja* on C64 but when I got a bit older, I was mildly obsessed with *Shien The Blade Chaser.*

Anthony Bull
Growing up I loved *Bad Dudes Vs Dragon Ninja*, it used so many tropes from classic Eighties ninja movies.

Simon Dueck
The best ninja game that I've finished: *Shadow Dancer.* The best one I haven't finished: *Strider* (sorry, Darran!)

Adam Jones
Tenchu on the PS1 was definitely my favourite as a ninja game. Sure you could *try* and slash your way to victory, but becoming the ultimate stealth assassin felt so rewarding.

Leigh Loveday
Shadow Warriors, the arcade version of *Ninja Gaiden*. It's not even that good but I love it unconditionally. It's got the best throw in beat-'em-ups and you can swing from a lamppost to kick people in the face with both feet, which is the ultimate ninja technique. [Agreed, it's very cool - Ed]

Paul Sunderland
For me it had to be *The Last Ninja*, the graphics, gameplay and definitely the music. I would just load the game up to listen to the music.

Fear na Ríomhairí
Ninja Blade – probably not the most obvious choice. Fantastic game by FromSoftware before they were famous for the *Souls* games. Picked it up for €2 in a bargain bin. Money well spent!

Harley Palmer
Ninja Taro on Game Boy. Forget *Zelda*, this little ninja hacks and slashes his way all across Japan to save the princess!

Fernando Briano
Does *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* count? *Turtles In Time* if so.

Christopher Henry
Shinobi on Game Gear was when I realised how cool ninjas were as a kid. Especially multicoloured ninjas who could cling to ceilings, walk on water, jump around in traffic or combust on command.

GC
I'll go with *Strider 2* (PS1) a surprisingly good adaptation of the arcade game !

Alan Passingham
Mark Of The Ninja for the win!

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

TERRANIGMA

"I managed to find a brand-new copy sealed for a tenner years ago, I found out this mail-order shop was selling them off. I've kept it in really nice condition."

PAID: £10

CHRONO TRIGGER

"My grandma got me a present when I passed my GCSEs, a copy of *Chrono Trigger* from CEX for 50 quid in mint condition. That's in really good nick still."

PAID: GIFT

BIO

NAME:
Richard Ellis

LOCATION:
Yorkshire, UK

FAVOURITE GAME:
Suikoden II

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
SNES, PlayStation, PS2

COLLECTION WORTH:
"£100,000 would be a conservative estimate"

GOOD THINGS IN SMALL PACKAGES

Richard's collection has grown naturally over 25 years

This month's collector has a bit of a surprising origin story, as he bounced off his first system, a Commodore 64. "I think I just found the actual kit quite hard to use when I was maybe seven years old," says Richard Ellis. "My parents realised the mistake, I kept asking for videogames still but I didn't like the videogames on my C64. I used to play on a Mega Drive in Comet, and that ended up being my proper first console." After some years enjoying games like *Sonic 2* and *Street Fighter II*, Richard sold up and got a SNES, which would open his eyes to the joy of RPGs.

Richard made the choice to look backwards earlier than most people. "I got a PlayStation, but I didn't actually like the early PlayStation games so a couple of years in I sold it, and I bought a SNES again. I got about a couple hundred quid for the games I had for it and I reinvested all of it back into Super Nintendo." So what brought him around to the PlayStation again? "I bought a PS2 and I started getting PlayStation and PS2 games, and I've pretty much just been gaming ever since. And anything that I bought pretty much from the age of 14 I've kept, so my collection is quite a long-standing collection I've built up over a long period of time."

As such, collecting was something that Richard fell into. "I didn't even realise that it was a collection until about seven years in, when I turned around and saw I had enough stuff to fill a room." As such, there hasn't been a guiding philosophy and no attempts to complete any collections. "Initially, my collection was lots of SNES, lots of PlayStation, lots of PS2, and I'd buy mainly Japanese RPGs because I've always enjoyed them, and one-on-one fighters. About ten years ago, when I first got my own home and space to have a games room, I opened my collection up, to buy any console that I owned in the past even briefly, and to get what I deemed to be the best games for it."

Physical constraints mean that Richard doesn't have the kind of collecting goals that many of our interviewees have. "I'm literally in a space now where I've nearly run out of room. I've got room for about ten more SNES games, five more Mega Drive games. And I've got room for about another ten Switch and maybe fifteen PS4 games. I have to be really careful what I get," he tells us. "I wouldn't mind a copy of *Battletoads & Double Dragon*, but I'm not even super excited about that. It's something I've always kind of wanted to own, but all the stuff I really want, I own."

CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

"It didn't have the art book. Five years later, I figured out that the art book in the Japanese copy is the same as the art book in the European copy. So I managed to get a cheap Japanese copy and complete it."

PAID: £5

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

EARTHBOUND

"I got in a bidding war when I was like 16 years old, and at the time I thought I'd been ripped off. I looked a couple of days ago, it's over a grand."

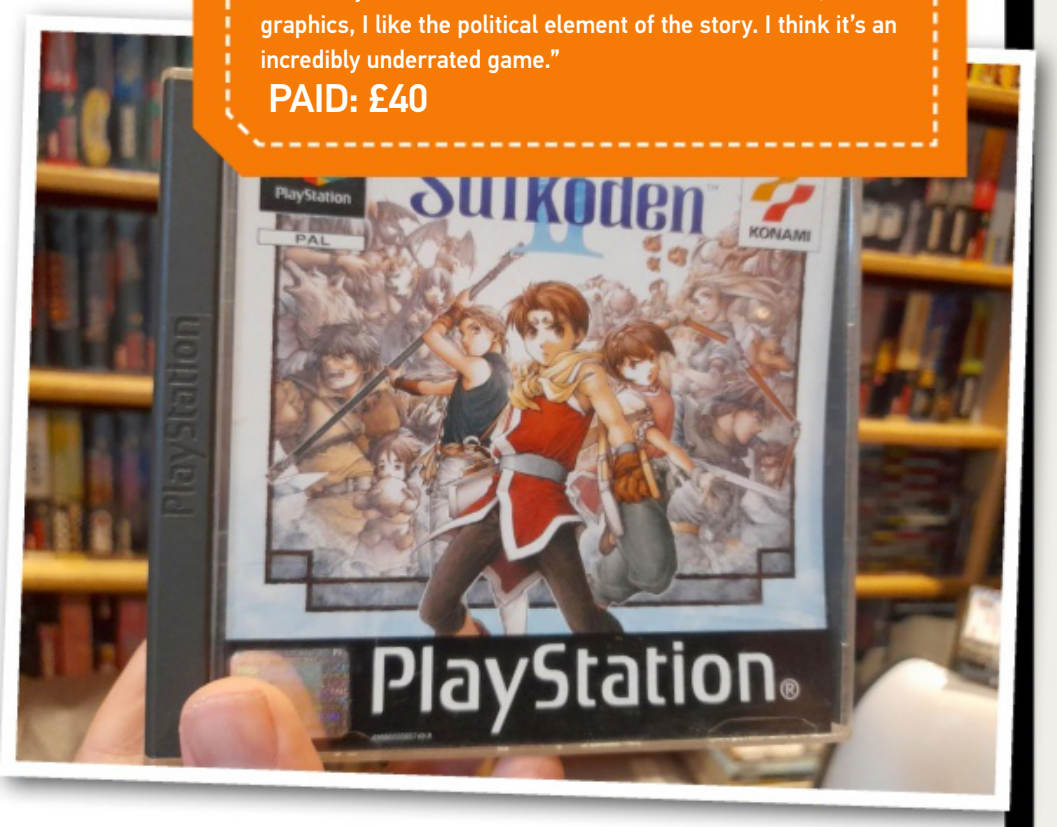
PAID: £160

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

SUIKODEN II

■ "It was the first PlayStation game I rebought when I got a PS2. I think it's the best RPG that's ever been made. It's absolutely fantastic. I love how the characters interact, the graphics, I like the political element of the story. I think it's an incredibly underrated game."

PAID: £40



BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

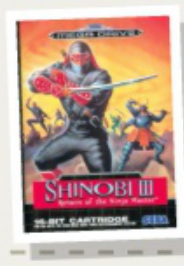
As Rare's game was a smash hit, it's not too hard to find today. A loose cartridge can go for as little as **£7.50,** while complete copies in good condition start at **£17.** If the CD is included, look to pay about **£45.**

DEMON ATTACK

Imagic's excellent Atari 2600 shoot-'em-up starts at **£7** for a loose cartridge and about **£13.50** boxed. There are a few different label variants, including a picture label and a plain white label, but they don't appear to affect prices.

MEGA LO MANIA

The cheapest version of Sensible's strategy game is the Mega Drive one, at just **£5** for a complete copy. The Atari ST version will cost you **£10** and the Amiga edition **£15.** On the SNES it can sell for **£40** boxed, but many sellers are shooting higher.



SHINOBI III: RETURN OF THE NINJA MASTER

This ninja is hard to capture – loose carts go for around **£40** though we've seen them sell for less, and complete copies start at around **£125.** Be sure to check what you're buying, as reproduction copies are now quite common.

SCREAMER

If you're just after the jewel case and disc, **£5** is all you need to pay. For those wanting to add the big box, that's **£15.** Those prices actually compare favourably to GOG's **£8.39** digital version, though that does feature compatibility fixes.

N-GAGE QD

The big challenge with this device is finding one with a good battery and a charger. **£50** is the lowest you'll get that for, but a boxed system will set you back **£120** or more. Refurbished units are out there too.

BIOSHOCK

Games of this generation are currently dirt cheap, and *BioShock* is a great example of that – you can find complete PC, Xbox 360 and PS3 copies for just **99p.** That includes the steelbook editions and budget re-releases.

HOW MUCH?!

SILENT HILL: SHATTERED MEMORIES

If you're a variant collector, you'll understand why someone might pay **£160** for the UK cover version of this PS2 horror game instead of **£80** for the PEGI-rated version. But why did six bidders push the price of another UK copy to **£303.05?** Only they know.

Prices correct at time of print

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

CONSUMED BY COLLECTING

Darran ponders his life choices

Regular readers of this section of the magazine will know I have a lot of games. You'll also know that I've used these pages of the magazine to occasionally mention the depression I've suffered from over the years as well. While I won't bore you with the reasons behind my long-term bouts of depression I will share something that some of you may have already guessed by now – I buy videogames as a coping mechanism.

I've always made excuses for the games I collect and to a point I still make some of them now. I grew up relatively poor as a child (our childhood photos of our home consist of mismatched furniture and all of us wearing hand-me-down clothes) and I've often wondered if my obsession with buying things partly stems from not having much growing up. I know many friends and family in a similar situation though and they don't exhibit my lust for owning things, so it's probably a little more deep-rooted than that.

Earlier this year I mentioned that I wouldn't buy new games unless I sold existing ones. It was a sound idea and for about five months I managed to do it and felt incredibly proud of myself, but then depression snuck up on me in mid-April and I turned to games because I find them comforting. Well that's not strictly true, I turned to the buying of games, because ultimately that's what I find comforting.

It may sound strange but I often get more satisfaction out of buying games than playing them. Don't get me wrong, I thoroughly enjoyed completing *Indiana Jones And The Infernal Machine* recently and sharing posts of my progress on Twitter and I'm currently having a fantastic time playing the first *God Of War* on PS3, but as fun as those escapades are they can't complete with the double dopamine hit that consists of buying/winning a game on eBay at what I perceive to being a good price and then having it turn up in the post.

When I was feeling low in April I started playing my Wii again and that led me down the rabbit hole of buying cheap games because you can pick many up in CEX for pennies. I get a huge thrill from going into any game-related shop and potentially finding things that I can add to my shelves. I enjoy the thrill of the hunt, but inevitably that thrill fades once I've amassed the games I want. To give you an idea of how it affects me, at the beginning of the year I had around 50 Wii games. When my depression returned in April I went on a Wii bender and I now own 134 games. That's not really healthy no matter what way you look at it.

did play quite a few of my Wii games during this period and completed a fair few too, but it wasn't long before I lost interest. I do this a lot in life, I find it very hard to hold my attention on a single thing because I get bored quickly. My new obsession is PS3 games. I initially justified this change in direction because we can arguably cover them in the mag and I'm sure some of them will feature over the coming months and years, but if I'm honest it's a distraction. It's a way to ignore and gloss over the things in my life that bother me, a way to feel at peace with myself, a way to centre myself.

Someone on Twitter recently suggested I was nothing more than a hoarder. It's a word I don't particularly like as to me it suggests someone who has no control over their actions. I'm sure some will consider what I'm doing isn't healthy mentally, and I absolutely know that there's a good chance I won't play many of the games I inevitably buy, so perhaps there's some truth to that description. But I'm aware of my shortcomings and I've now started to accept them, while learning how I can change. I've spent far too much time as an adult feeling guilty because I'd get criticised for spending £300 on a game I used to own, or because an idea suddenly popped into my head to own a LaserDisc player and rebuy plenty of films that I already have superior versions of on 4K Blu-Ray. No more, though.

There's clearly an aspect of my psyche which is broken and buying things is a way to fix it. It's never a permanent fix but it has managed to get me through the last 48 years of my life so it's something I'm no longer going to feel bad about even though I'd like to address it. Regardless of whether you perceive my habits to be that of a collector or a hoarder they're habits that make me happy. As long as my obsessive binges don't come at the expense of my wife and daughters' wellbeing I'm going to continue doing the thing that makes me happy and find a way to channel it to make me happier. After all, life's too bloody short.

If any aspects of your own collecting or gaming causes you anxiety, please consider reaching out to those who can offer you suitable help.

KIDDING MYSELF

Dissecting the justification game

IT'S AN INVESTMENT

I've said this a lot in the past and heard it said, but it never rings true. There are much better ways to invest your money.

IT'S TO PLAY WITH THE KIDS

Again, this occasionally happens and it's fun when it occurs, but ultimately my girls don't care for old games like I do.

THEY'RE TOO CHEAP TO PASS UP

This is a trap I fall into a lot. While a game costing a £1 isn't back-breaking in itself, those costs soon mount and they take up a lot of space on your shelves.

IT'S AN ACCLAIMED GAME

Once upon a time I'd buy games for no other reason than they were acclaimed. I soon realised I was often buying games I had no interest in, so I stopped doing it.

EVEN THOUGH I HAVE PROMOS FOR GAMES LIKE DRIVER: SAN FRANCISCO AND NIER, I'M STILL INTENDING TO GET PROPER VERSIONS OF THEM.
[PS3] I ALREADY OWN SIREN: BLOOD CURSE DIGITALLY, BUT I NOW ALSO OWN A PHYSICAL COPY. GO ME!
I OWN EVERY SINGLE VERSION OF THIS SERIES THAT EXISTS, AND YET I'VE ONLY PLAYED TWO OF THEM TO COMPLETION. NOT GOOD.

MY PS3 COLLECTION FOCUSSES ON EXCLUSIVES AND THIRD-PARTY RELEASES NOT AVAILABLE ON XBOX SERIES X.
DEPRESSION CAUSED MY WII COLLECTION TO TRIPLE IN SIZE. IT'S DOUBLE-STACKED AS WELL.
[PS3] JOHN LINNEMAN'S RECENT PS3 SERIES ON 1080P GAMES MADE ME REALISE I'D LIKE TO OWN THE RAYMAN GAMES AGAIN.
[PS3] I'VE BEEN REALLY ENJOYING REPLAYING GOD OF WAR, BUT NOT AS MUCH AS BUYING NEW GAMES.

COMBATTING THE BLUES

Have games helped readers battle their own depression?

Dom O'Brien
Yep. I've written about how gaming (specifically *Dead Rising* and *Resident Evil 3* original) helped me get a handle on my (sometimes crippling) OCD.

pastelpixels
Aside from cosplay, gaming does help me cope with my depression. I wouldn't be where I am without gaming.

Scott Wozniak
My dad passed away suddenly in '88 when I was 18. I'd just moved out on my own. I remember playing a lot of Infocom text adventures (*Zork*, *Hitchhiker's Guide*, etc) on my C64 to deal with the grief.

ACO
For sure. From casual games like *Animal Crossing*, *Thrillville* and Sims, to some FPS games like *Dark Forces*, *Jedi Knight* and *Doom*. Those types of games are the most stress relieving for me.

Mark R Jones
Oh yes. I had my first experience of depression just as *Donkey Kong 64* came out on the N64. That game helped me keep occupied during the time I didn't really go out anywhere.

Stacey
During a very tough time in my life, *Skyrim* kept me going. It gave me something to really focus on. I could also go wherever I wanted, and I felt free. It's my all-time favourite game because of this.

David Shepphard
Not knowingly, but I firmly believe gaming must help to some degree. I'd sure as hell be depressed without them for a distraction.

flynn
Yes, whether it's playing a comfort game (*Donkey Kong Country*/*Spyro The Dragon*) or something new. It helps me get out of my own head and focus on something else. It can be a nice little escape.

Hedders
The period of my life where my mental health was at its absolute worst coincides with the period where I stopped gaming. When I took it up again, it improved.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

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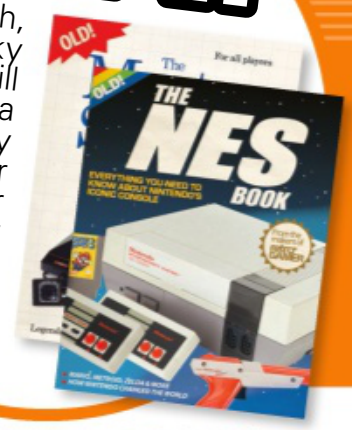
Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of either our NES/Master System or SNES/Mega Drive books



STAR LETTER

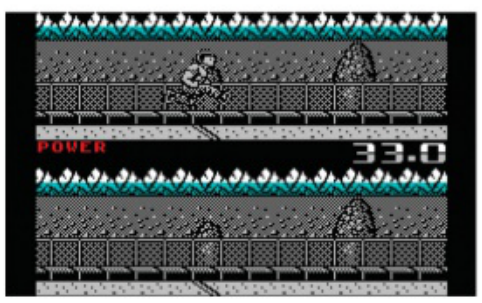
SATURN FOREVER

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I was wondering which of the following three Sega consoles you guys like: the Mega Drive, Saturn or Dreamcast? I like the Sega Saturn.

Not only are its imported games awesome but there are some game ports which were even better than their PlayStation versions. It's easy to see why Sega Saturn was dismissed in the West because most of those great imported games never made it overseas and there was no proper *Sonic* game except *Sonic R*. But now that I have seen with my own eyes what Saturn can do, I have become a big fan of it. Anyway, I am sure that the **Retro Gamer** team will have different opinions as to which Sega console they like.
Cheers,
Zahir Hassan

Thanks for your letter, Zahir. Here's what the team has to say. Darran went with the Saturn saying, "It's got an incredible selection of shmups and its Japanese library is more diverse than people realise." Nick on the other hand opted for Dreamcast, saying, "It received an incredible number of excellent games in just a few years, and its online functions opened up the world to me."

» [Saturn] Zahir loves the import Saturn scene and with games like *Guardian Force* we do too.



» [ZX Spectrum] We sympathise with Darren. We've lost many a joystick to a good button basher or waggle-fest.

BISHI BASHI SPECIAL

Dear gents of **Retro Gamer**,
The developers of games with extensive QTE sections owe me brand-new pads. All the button bashing from those QTEs get a bit demanding on my hardware and said hardware isn't cheap. Have you seen the sodding prices of official pads these days? (Of course you have, you're videogame journalists.) I can't be the only one who's asked themselves, "Why am I bashing the shit out of my £60 controller?" Keep up the great work fellas and please cover the Saturn like you did with the SNES, PS2 and N64. The best console ever deserves it.
Stay safe and take care,
Darren Nicholls

You make a very good point, Darren. We've lost count of the joysticks we broke playing games like *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* and *Combat School* back in the day. Good call on the Saturn feature, as Nick has already discussed it.

» [N64] Nick loves wrestling games so we'll find a way to cover games like *WWF: No Mercy*.

ALL HAIL AKI

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I'd love to see you cover the most fertile period in wrestling game history – AKI's run of *WCW* and *WWF* games on the N64. For me these games have yet to be matched, and I'd love to read a deep dive into the games, and what the truth is about the supposed *No Mercy* sequel that we never got! Thanks for the mag each month,
Mike

If we're honest Mike, it's developer access stopping this. Nick's still confident he can put something together, though.

ALL TOGETHER

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I just needed to say thank you. I hear my letterbox go and realise, I AM NOT ALONE. I recently visited an excellent retro arcade, and spent my day shooting zombies in *The House Of The Dead 2* before drifting my way around a *Ridge Racer* machine. Is there a better way to spend the day? There is little point to this letter except to tell you, the reader, YOU ARE NOT ALONE.
James Hackman

It's great to hear you enjoyed your arcade visit James and we're glad you feel part of the Retro Gamer community.

» [Arcade] James Hackman recently enjoyed *The House Of The Dead 2* and *Ridge Racer* at a local arcade visit.

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» Hopefully Chris enjoyed our recent Studio Profile on The Sales Curve.

PRESERVATION, IT'S IMPORTANT

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

As a subscriber for a few years now, I want to say how much I enjoy the Studio Profile feature as I think this is as much a part of game preservation as the actual software itself. I'm 100% behind any form of software preservation where the title is no longer available physically or digitally for purchase but in my opinion, there should also be some sort of preservation of information about software houses and how they began to where, in most cases, they ended. I've seen some Wiki sites on this but wondered if there is any sort of official site that holds this type of info?

Chris Jowett

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Prey

It's a well-known fact that all *Predator* sequels are terrible so the fact *Prey* went straight to Disney + didn't really fill the team with hope. Turn's out it's okay, with Darran saying it's, "The best *Predator* sequel yet." He also added, "That's a very low bar to clear." Tim liked it too, saying, "It was better than that last one." Nick's yet to see it, but Andy concluded that *Prey* is, "An excellent example of how to expand a classic franchise."

We're glad you enjoy the Studio Profile, Chris. You're quite right that it's important to document this information, although we can't think of anything official. Maybe a reader will be able to help?

Your say

» [SNES] It appears that lots of you are huge fans of *Diddy's Kong Quest*.

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Donkey Kong Country game?

Daley Eve

Donkey Kong Country 2. It took the best bits of the original and injected them with banana juice. It has to be one of the greatest games of all time.

ACO

The first one. It was mind-blowing to see the SNES pull off what it did.

Retro Blast

Donkey Kong Country 2. Not only was it a more polished game with improved mechanics and level design, the soundtrack by David Wise is one of the greatest on the SNES. Ever.

Simon Morgan

Donkey Kong Country on the SNES. It felt like a giant leap forward at the time. Awesome soundtrack too. I stayed at university through the Easter holiday to work on my final year project. That wouldn't have been necessary if it wasn't for *DKC*'s launch a few months earlier.

Jason

Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze. It is platforming perfection. Easily one of the best platformers ever.

Victor Mildew

Donkey Kong Land for the Game Boy. Got bought it while on holiday in Florida and spent every spare moment playing it while my parents got ready. Managed to fully complete it too.

Adam Bell

The original *Donkey Kong Country* means so much to me. As a wide-eyed child *Donkey Kong Island* looked like such a real, lived-in place with personality. I studied the gorgeous vista of Vine Valley and I'm still seeing new details that add to the island's world and history.

Donkey Kong 2001

My favourite is *Donkey Kong Country 2* because the soundtrack is sublime, just like the level design.

Jed (THEJGG)

Donkey Kong Country Returns. Very diverse, clever, challenging and sometimes unique level design (eg Sunset Shore), music that expands and improves upon the original *DKC* score superbly, and responsive controls. Also hit home Retro Studios' reputation as master craftsmen.

Martin Games

Donkey Kong Country because of the music in the underwater level… the track is amazing. [Agreed – Ed]

Paul

Donkey Kong Country 2 by some considerable distance. It gets the balance just right in terms of improving on the original without going too far. It is a joy to play throughout.

OBtweets

Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze, it is an endlessly replayable game with great level design, mechanics, bosses and music.

retro GAMER

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Mario Kart DS

BLUE SHELL THE WORLD

» DS » 2005 » NINTENDO EAD

If you want to start a contentious debate, just rank the entries in the *Mario Kart* series – you'll soon reveal the *Double Dash!!* diehards and *64* sceptics. I won't do a full ranking for that very reason, but I will say that *Mario Kart DS* is easily in my personal top three. It's the last one before they changed the drifting mechanic, and it has some truly awesome tracks like Waluigi Pinball, Airship Fortress and Luigi's Mansion. But in truth, my fond memories of the game have as much to do with the DS itself as the game design.

I was pretty suspicious of the DS when it was first announced. Did a second screen really enhance gaming that much? Could a touch screen really be that transformative? I wasn't convinced. But it turned out to be revolutionary in a much more mundane way. I hadn't regularly played multiplayer games on older handhelds, mostly because they were a pain to set up – I never had a link cable of my own, and save for *Pokémon*, most of my friends had different games to me. The DS had both local and online wireless connectivity, and download play for those who didn't have their own cartridges. Suddenly, handheld multiplayer was relatively hassle free.

As a result, *Mario Kart DS* was the first handheld game that I regularly enjoyed in multiplayer, and I have so many fond memories of doing so. Finding a local pub with free Wi-Fi just to experience an online race for the first time. Hanging out with my friends at the back of Summer Of Sonic, furiously battling for first place. Countless sneak attacks in the bar at Namco's County Hall arcade in London, nefarious moves that made my friends shout, "Who's playing as Yoshi?!" So many fantastic moments to treasure, and half of them probably wouldn't have happened if I'd had to remember to bring a link cable.

1
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x2
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TIME 2:29:060

ENDGAME

VIRTUA FIGHTER KIDS: JEFFRY'S ENDING

» Let's be honest, the Virtua Fighter Kids are weird kids. Just look at Jeffry – he's a child with a thick beard, and an inexplicable rivalry with one particular shark. We didn't know anybody like that at school, and we were weird kids who had a magnetic effect on other weird kids. Anyway, it turns out Jeffry wins the game if you're good, so let's see what happens when he does.

01

» Jeffry has finally won the World Fighting Tournament, and this time he's going to get that Satan Shark once and for all. So he wanders to the water with his trident, finds his eternal adversary and does some vigorous poking.

02

» Looks like Jeffry's going to need a bigger trident – all he's done is anger his fishy foe. And just when Jeffry thought it was safe to retreat to dry land, the Satan Shark rises to its tail and gives chase.

03

» That is where the Satan Shark made its biggest mistake. You see, we have certain rules here on land, and one of those is that you don't trample the flowers. Jeffry is now filled with the righteous fury of a gardener.

04

» Suddenly, Jeffry remembers that he's on land and has the advantage over some ridiculous fish with no legs. So he goes on the attack, summoning a huge amount of strength and courage to hoist the shark up above his head.

05

» With the power of a mariner, Jeffry then brings the Satan Shark crashing down to the ground with his Splash Mountain powerbomb. He might not have finished the villain for good, but at least for today, his flowers are safe from being squished.

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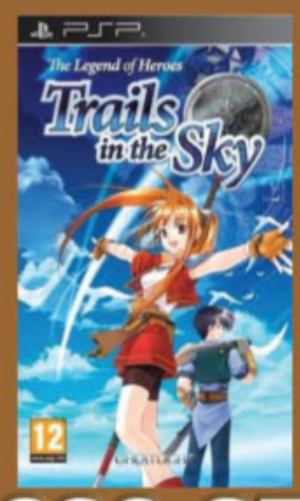

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